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ABSTRACT

This study offers a broad view of community college students who enter college underprepared for the rigors of credit-bearing coursework. The dissertation employed Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' theories and practices of portraiture as a mode of qualitative inquiry. The study examined the lives of four reading and writing students who placed into the Basic Education Program. The researcher conducted the investigation over a period of more than 18 months, discussing home, school, work, and social lives with the students and interviewing family members, friends, co-workers, teachers, and others. Along with the interviews, artifacts were collected, particularly the students' writing. Each of the students, as members of a reading workshop, wrote 14 different letters about the reading, conversing, and reflecting they did throughout the term. The dissertation concludes that issues that bear examining include deficiencies in academic setting, environmental distractions, and home cultures unfamiliar with the culture of academia. The paper cites McLaren, who observes that students tend to be most valued in school if their "cultural capital" is similar to that of the academy's powerbrokers. The study also argues that students are sorted, ranked, and classified beginning in elementary school, thus setting the stage early to limit access to higher education. (NB)

IF A TREE FALLS IN THE FOREST...
 LISTENING FOR MY STUDENTS' VOICES:
 A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF "UNDERPREPARED" COLLEGE FRESHMEN

A Dissertation
 by
 Christine G. Berg

Submitted to the Department of Reading
 Hofstra University
 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

May 1999

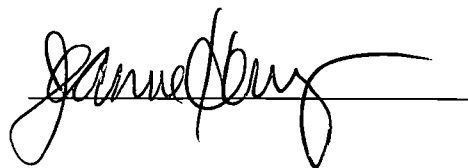
Dissertation Committee

Dr. Jeanne Henry, Chair
 Dr. Rosebud Elijah
 Dr. Joan Zaleski

Examination Committee

Dr. Myrna Skidell
 Dr. Alan Flurkey

Approved as to style and content by:



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Abstract

This study offers a broader view than readily available of community college students who enter college "underprepared" for the rigors of credit-bearing coursework. Employing Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' (1997) theories and practices of portraiture as a mode of qualitative inquiry, this investigation examined the lives of four college reading and writing students. The study explored the strengths, capabilities, knowledge, and insights these students brought with them to their college classrooms along with their academic vulnerabilities.

The investigation was conducted over a period of more than eighteen months from the students' first semester in college during the fall of 1997 through their fourth. The students who collaborated in this inquiry initially placed into the college's Basic Education Program, a full-time equivalent, non-credit course of study encompassing college-preparatory work in reading, English (writing), math, and an introductory freshman seminar. Their placement was determined by scores on entrance examinations administered by the college to all incoming freshmen.

I worked as a reading instructor with these students during their semester in the Basic Education Program. We began our individual collaborations during the Spring 1998 term, throughout which we met approximately once a week. We met regularly, but less frequently, over the summer which followed and across the 1998-1999 academic year. During our meetings, we discussed the home, school, work, and social lives of these four student-collaborators as well as the capabilities and competencies they employed and nurtured to navigate their lives.

Interviews were conducted with family members, friends, coworkers, teachers, and others the student-collaborators and I considered potentially informative. Visits to homes, schools, classrooms, places of employment, and houses of worship also provided insights into the life experiences of those whose portraits are presented in this study.

Drawing on the work of Abbott (1995, 1997); Gardner (1993); Gordon (1995); Gordon, Bowman, and McCallister (in progress); and Sternberg (1990, 1997), the capabilities and competencies which were revealed through these multiple sources were analyzed in terms of their origins in the lives of the four student-collaborators and with respect to their potential value to the academic community. The investigation indicates that standardized college placement tests, even when accompanied by school transcripts, cannot serve to summarize students' past accomplishments, define their present competencies, or determine their futures. Such assessments ignore the variety of capabilities all students, including "developmental" students, bring with them to the college classroom.

This study illustrates that while various competencies are grounded in lives beyond formal education, those who evidence these competencies teach the academy well. They enrich the academic community even as their lives are enhanced by their pursuit of higher education.

Acknowledgments

Painting my students' portraits has been an exhausting and exhilarating experience. As I have extended myself in this effort, I have been blessed with the friendship, guidance, and support of many people.

First of all, I am forever grateful to my four student-collaborators. Without Tree, McKenna, Julius, and Destiny, I would have no study. They have brought their boundless enthusiasm, trenchant insights, and profound sensitivities to our work together. Their continued friendship makes me very thankful.

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In memory of
Grace Gemino,
the most curious person I've ever known

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Christine G. Berg
Hofstra University
Reading Department

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Literacy Studies/Reading Department

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CHAPTER 1

The Origins of This Inquiry

A Brief History of "Remedial Education" in College

America's first college, founded through a 1624 decree of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was designed primarily to train clergy to replace those who had come from England for the purpose of ministering to the colonists (Boylan & White, 1987). When this school, Harvard College, opened in 1636, it was immediately faced with the "need for remediation among its students" (Boylan & White, p. 4), largely because Latin, the language of academic books and instruction, was unfamiliar to those potential ministers who attempted to matriculate. Since English was not adopted as the language of higher education in America until after the Revolutionary War, "remedial" services played a key role in the roots of the U.S. college and university system.

As the United States grew and prospered in the early part of the nineteenth century, so did its system of formal education. While "Jacksonian Democracy" encouraged the creation of a larger, broader group of colleges and college students than ever before, few of these "new students" had much preparation for this pursuit. However, these students did have the financial resources necessary to pay tuition to these new colleges, so it was imperative that these institutions facilitate their enrollees' access to their offerings. "Remedial" services departments became essential, not only to the survival of college students, but to the economic well-being of the colleges themselves (Boylan & White, 1987).

After the Civil War, the Morrill or Land Grant Act stimulated further growth in U.S. centers of academic learning. According to Boylan and White (1987), this act

"made it clear that institutions established as a result of [it] should ... promote access to higher education to a greater variety of citizens" (p. 4-5). At the same time, private colleges chartered to serve African Americans, as well as those established to admit women, opened throughout the country (Jones & Richards-Smith, 1987). With the entry of these new students, and a generally larger and wider population of college students than ever before, came an increase in "the number of college students who were underprepared for college" (Boylan & White, p. 5).

The system of higher education in the U.S. expanded further in the early part of the twentieth century with the rise of the two year or junior college (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). These schools provided an alternative to the college preparatory coursework offered by the four year schools, thereby de-emphasizing remediation in institutions offering baccalaureate degrees. Yet, such programs did not disappear entirely among these schools. In fact, according to Enright and Kerstiens (1980), "between 30 and 60 percent of those postsecondary institutions polled in 1942 either offered or planned to offer remedial reading and study skills programs" (p. 2). According to Maxwell (1979), this trend continued with as many as two-thirds of all college freshmen in the 1950s needing reading remediation in order to succeed.

The post-World War II "baby boom" led to a still greater number of students seeking admission to four year colleges. This prompted a tightening of the criteria used by these colleges and universities to admit applicants and a corresponding decrease in the remedial services offered by such schools (Boylan, 1988). On the other hand, two year institutions increased the scope of their college preparatory programs.

When the selectivity of the 1960s gave way to the "open admissions" policies of the 1970s, colleges and universities returned to the 19th and early 20th century traditions of offering incoming students additional preparation for their college coursework. The terminology used to refer to such programming has continued to vary according to its theoretical framework. "Remedial" programs, with their emphasis on correcting deficiencies, have given way to "developmental" or "learning assistance" programs, so named because their association with the notion of student "development" (Perry, 1968) during the college years "gave credibility to their efforts and eased the path through legislative funding processes" (Hashway, 1990, p. ix). However, for the most part, "remedial education,' 'developmental education,' 'basic studies,' and 'compensatory education' are used interchangeably to describe those areas of the [college] curriculum that suggest less-than-college-level studies" (Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. xix).

Regardless of their identifying nomenclature, the purpose of such programs is, theoretically, to "help underprepared students make a successful adjustment to college" (Boylan, 1988, p. 3). In this sense, contemporary college "developmental" education is not new; rather it has been an integral part of the American tradition of higher education since the establishment of Harvard College in 1636.

My Work at the College

The Basic Education Program

The students with whom I work come to Island Community College from a variety of settings and situations. Based on their performances on a series of placement tests in reading, English and math administered by the college to all incoming freshmen, they have been deemed "underprepared" for the rigors of higher level academic

coursework and are required to enroll in the Basic Education Program, a one semester, full-time equivalent, non-credit course of study.

This program, which was created in response to the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools' request that the college provide support for all students seeking to enroll, is divided into four components: an English course designed to help prepare students for the writing tasks required by the college's various content courses, a reading course planned to encourage students to become comfortable readers of a variety of texts, a math course created to review the elements of basic math upon which college math courses are founded, and a seminar class intended to serve as an orientation to college life in and out of the classroom. In order to receive state or federally funded financial aid, some students also take a three credit course in office technology or health.

The Problem

My daily professional and personal experiences with my students have made me increasingly curious about the population considered "underprepared," so I have read a great deal of the literature published about this group. I find it to be overwhelmingly deficit-based. In an effort to address the problem of "remediating" my students, the research emphasizes the ways in which these students are "lacking." Claxton (1990), for example, claims that "developmental" college students are more passive about their learning than "non-developmental" students and inclined to have fewer skills in abstract thinking while holding to a pragmatic view of learning that exhibits little interest in learning for its own sake. Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) report that these students, as first generation college students, have weaker cognitive skills than the college population at large.

Others who have investigated this population also make judgments about their limitations. Roberts (1990) attempts to define these students by their deficiencies. He claims that their "skills, knowledge, and academic abilities are significantly below those of the 'typical' students in the college in which they are enrolled" (p. 197). Erwin (1990) observes that the academic deficiencies specifically relating to the reading activities of "developmental" college students are complicated by their "less than average world knowledge" (p. 264).

Still others who write about this group indict students who enter college through open-admissions policies as psychologically, emotionally, and morally unfit to participate in the academy. Traub (1994) describes the "developmental" students he observed at City College of New York:

... the students seemed barely socialized to school: they giggled, and whispered, and flirted, and did their best to avoid eye contact with [the teacher].... The climate felt torpid.... These were students who drifted through high school with an implicit contract: I won't disturb you if you won't disturb me. (p. 96)

He concludes that the students "were arriving at college so deeply disadvantaged, psychologically as well as academically, that City was virtually unable to help them" (p. 109).

In Needham's (1994) discussion of the contemporary community college student, she describes Patty, a student requiring "extensive developmental studies" (p. 23) before qualifying for college-credit courses. Needham sees Patty as representative of those "loose cannons" (p. 22) of the college classroom who come from "deprived backgrounds [and] intellectual wastelands" (p. 22).

Even those educators whose writing emphasizes their appreciation of "underprepared" or "basic" college readers and writers tend to discuss these students in terms of what they lack. Shaughnessy (1977), for example, a pioneer in attempting to determine the needs of the "underprepared" student, saw this group as "strangers in academia, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life, unprepared for the sorts of tasks their teachers were about to assign them" (p. 3). Wilson's (1994) portrayal of Darleen, an "underprepared" college student, acknowledges Darleen's right to schooling while examining her background for explanations of her deficiencies.

Although my experience concurs with the findings which claim that "developmental" college students tend to have poor academic records, I consider this a limited perspective, not only in terms of the measurements used to evaluate students, but also in relation to what such measurements actually determine. Most of my students bring to college prior school transcripts indicating weak performance in the assessments used to evaluate traditional academic proficiency. Upon entering college, they demonstrate similar deficiencies on a battery of standardized tests administered for purposes of placement into courses of study. Currently, this battery is in transition from those completed by paper and pencil to those performed on a computer. However, the students enrolled at Island Community College have been, and will continue to be, evaluated according to standardized tests commonly used among open-admissions institutions across the country (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). At this time, students place into the Basic Education Program when their scores on the Iowa Silent Reading Test¹ are in the ninth or tenth decile and their scores on the Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK)² are in the ninth or tenth decile in English and in the seventh through tenth

deciles in math. In addition, they score poorly on a holistically graded writing task which is created by the college's English department and completed at the testing site in response to a prompt.

These forms of assessment, so widely used at colleges across the U.S. to place students into programs, are limited in that they value only those abilities and accomplishments that tend to be stressed in the traditional classroom including the ability to recall and, to a lesser extent, analyze information regardless of its relevance to the individual (Sternberg, 1997). The use of such assessments is based on the assumption that the skills a student acquires from taking a college course are directly related to the academic skills the student has previously acquired through school (Sawyer, 1989). If these measuring instruments predict anything, it is only comparable academic performance in a comparable academic setting.

This is hugely problematic. Traditional academic assessments reward only those students for whom these measures are relevant and penalize those for whom the information being tested is not personally meaningful in the contexts of their lives (Sternberg, 1997). Scores on standardized college placement tests, even when accompanied by school transcripts, simply cannot serve to summarize students' past accomplishments, define their present competencies, or determine their futures. Such assessments undermine the individuals they attempt to evaluate because they fail to reveal the variety of capabilities all students, including "developmental" students, bring with them to the college classroom. They fail to acknowledge the contributions each individual has to offer all of us within and beyond the academy.

I am not alone in this viewpoint. Other educators of "developmental" students discuss the richness of the abilities and accomplishments of their students. Henry (1995) describes the students she worked with at Northern Kentucky University in terms of their occupational achievements and management of family responsibilities. Rose (1989) mentions the diverse backgrounds of several of his "underprepared" students to create his argument that these students lack acceptance by the college community. These perspectives offer evidence of the intricate experiential base upon which my students build their expertise and capabilities and encourage me to build mine.

My students lead busy, eventful, productive lives. They tend to parents, children, and other family members. They work 40 or more hours a week while attending school on a full-time basis. They come to college from Port-au-Prince, Haiti; Athens, Greece; New Delhi, India; the inner cities, and the suburban communities of the northeastern United States. They travel throughout the United States, Albania, the Philippines, South America, Central America, and Rikers Island. They enjoy enormous success as All-American football players, prize-winning artists, published authors, and lifesaving medical professionals. They negotiate life-threatening dangers on the streets and on their jobs, in their schools and in their homes.

They share with me their insights as they participate in the society of a school in a quintessentially suburban American community and travel a mile or two to a home whose culture is a reflection of life in a country a continent away. When I sit with my students enjoying casual conversation at my dinner table and hear one of them say to my son, "Man, you don't know how lucky you are. I never had one meal in my life with my father at my table," I get a glimpse at a lifestyle that differs from mine.

My students bring life experiences like these, and the capabilities they have nurtured through these experiences, to college with them along with their academic vulnerability. There is no revelation of this in strictly academic sketches.

Narrow views of what constitutes academic preparation for college persist among the leaders of the educational hierarchy (Abbott, 1994). Moreover, these views fuel the ever-increasing trend in the political arenas which control academic funding to consider "underpreparedness" as reason to exclude "remedial" students from public institutions' hallowed halls (Breneman & Haarlow, 1999; Phipps, 1998). This denies targeted students educational opportunities through which to stimulate their own and the academy's intellectual growth as well as to ground their lives beyond the academy (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996).

Contemporary American society esteems those whose professions require college diplomas, not only in view of academic accomplishment, but also in terms of economic reward. Furthermore, members of such professions tend to be concentrated in the current power structures in this country and throughout the world. Many "developmental" college readers and writers are members of ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups who have been otherwise marginalized by the academic hierarchy and the American political power structure (Boylan, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). As Gordon (1995) observes, contemporary American educators and gatekeepers to education tend to confront the issues related to access from "the point of view of personal biases and the hegemonic identity of the dominant group" (p. 362).

The political and academic gatekeepers who control higher education must confront the implications of their perspective. To deny members of marginalized groups

access to the academy is to maintain the current hegemony, to preserve the traditional social order. While this may be convenient for those in power, it is wrong within a democratic structure. Instead of maintaining the traditional hierarchical social order, policy makers must acknowledge the ever-increasing interconnectedness of diverse groups of people. Gatekeepers must not only accommodate cross-cultural tolerance but also facilitate communication and understanding (Gordon, Bowman, & McCallister, in progress) through educational policy and practice.

Those of us committed to justice in society, and specifically in the society of the academy, must reexamine the narrow notions of competency currently used to evaluate the diverse populations of students who seek the opportunities afforded by higher education. We must recognize that in the pluralistic society into which America has evolved, individuals from cultures beyond those traditionally present in the academy must be afforded the educational opportunity that holds the promise of intellectual stimulation and social mobility (Purcell-Gates, 1997; Heath, 1992; Giroux, 1992; Shannon, 1992).

Sternberg (1997) discusses various abilities which are often ignored by the academy but are, nevertheless, essential for productivity in society. He considers creative, evaluative, and practical strengths as under-appreciated by traditional education, but as critical for the assumption of a contributing societal role. Gordon, Bowman, and McCallister (in progress) consider various forms of "intellective" and personal competence, including the abilities involved in weaving various contexts together meaningfully, as undervalued in traditional school settings yet essential for the negotiation of life in the pluralistic society of contemporary America.

Abbott (1995, 1997) contrasts the "old competencies" including "numeracy" and "traditional literacy," historically revered in the academy, with the "new competencies," including any of the "range of higher-order skills" such as "the ability to synthesize, to solve problems, to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty, and, especially, to be creative and personally enterprising" (1995, p. 8). He also views these "new competencies" as ignored in the classroom yet increasingly necessary for the assumption of a contributing role in society. Abbott asserts that the development of these competencies largely stems "from experiences of an active life, and require[s] a far broader base than a classroom" (1995, p. 8). It has been my observation over the years that my students create, utilize, and nurture capabilities such as those discussed by Sternberg (1997); Gordon, Bowman, and McCallister (in progress); and Abbott through their negotiation of their lives in and out of school. My study examines evidence of this through my investigation of my students' past and present experiences in various settings.

Through this inquiry, I seek to enter my students' voices into the debate about their membership in the academy. Through my students, I challenge those who claim such students are "underprepared" by offering a glimpse of who they are, how they see the world, and what they have to offer society in and beyond the academy. My students' portraits make it evident that traditionally measured academic achievements reflect only a limited aspect of preparation for life, including life in college. Their stories emphasize, not what "developmental" students may lack in preparation for college, but what they bring to the academy that can help all of us grow in its environment and expedite our efforts to facilitate individual and collective well-being.

The value of my study is related to my belief that while various competencies are grounded in lives extending beyond the academy, they can and should still be addressed by educators in schools. Sternberg (1997) acknowledges this when he observes that students are tested and classified largely on their ability to memorize information and, in a limited way, to analyze it. Those whose strengths lie in other areas are undervalued within the context of school, often causing these students to become disenfranchised from the process of learning as it exists in traditional American schools. This deprives, not only those marginalized students, but all students and the system itself, from learning through the capabilities of all of its members.

Research about individuals who have been influential in society has found that many of these individuals were considered "mediocre" students (Gardner, 1993, 1995). Their strengths and capabilities were untapped within the context of school. They succeeded in spite of their formal educational experience rather than through its encouragement. This is an indictment of the systems of education which fail to build upon the diversity among learners. According to Sternberg (1997); Gordon, Bowman, and McCallister (in progress); and Abbott (1994, 1995), academic institutions of all levels should provide learning environments which acknowledge, appreciate, and encourage all individuals to build on their strengths. It is through this that all learners can develop and nurture new capabilities.

The study my students and I have conducted contributes to this view. Those of us in the college community must acknowledge and identify the various capabilities "developmental" students evidence so that we can build upon these competencies to facilitate intellectual stimulation and academic growth in our students and in ourselves.

Guiding Questions

Since the 1960s when open-admissions policies afforded access to college to a larger and more diverse population than ever before, little has been written about those students who enter college "underprepared" for its academic rigors. Even less has been presented which considers the population deemed "underprepared" from any perspective other than that which emphasizes this group's "deficits." The purpose of this investigation is to present a multidimensional view, broader than those previously recorded, of individuals who are required to take "developmental" reading and writing courses before they begin their college credit-bearing coursework. As my students and I have been studying their lives, before and during their negotiation of college, the following questions have framed our exploration:

What capabilities do I see evident in my student-collaborators from exploring their past and present home, school, work, and social experiences?

How do others who have shared the various contexts of my students' lives see them (as capable) within their shared contexts?

How do my students see themselves as capable within the various contexts of their lives?

How do my students see themselves and their capabilities in relation to the abilities or competencies traditionally valued by the academy?

How do my students utilize their capabilities to negotiate the academy? How do they use their capabilities to harness the academy's resources and overcome its barriers? How do they see themselves utilizing their capabilities in this negotiation and as members of the academy?

This inquiry has by no means attempted to provide a conclusive or in any way comprehensive portrait of the "developmental" college student. Rather, I am offering a glimpse at four individual students' lives and my experiences as a teacher who has worked with these individuals. In doing so, we challenge the narrow views often presented in the literature and offer a broader perspective.

Methodology

In considering this study from the stance of a qualitative researcher, I am aware of the subjective nature of my work. I have been researching issues about which I feel strongly. I realize that I need to account for my methodology and interpretation of my findings based, not only on my personal experiences and beliefs, but also in terms of the literature in my field of inquiry and in the area of research theory and practice. The model of qualitative inquiry and representation offered by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' (1997) in The Art and Science of Portraiture has provided me with a frame for my work. According to these researchers, portraiture operates within the qualitative inquiry paradigm yet breaks from its usual application in that it seeks to focus on health and resilience rather than on pathology and disease:

[Portraiture] is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections. The researcher who asks first "what is good here?" is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure....

In examining the dimensionality and complexity of goodness, there will, of course, be ample evidence of vulnerability and weakness. In

fact, the counterpoint and contradictions of strength and vulnerability, virtue and evil (and how people... negotiate those extremes...) are central to the expression of goodness. (p. 9)

In holding that the methods that shape qualitative inquiry can be utilized to examine what is good, healthy, strong, and capable about a phenomenon, portraiture speaks to the nature of my study. It is particularly apt that this form of investigation does not attempt to idealize what it studies, but sees, in the negotiation of vulnerability, the power of goodness. When I consider the "underprepared" students with whom I have been collaborating, I, too, find evidence of vulnerabilities that they are compelled to address as they make their way through college. Often it is in this negotiation, that their capabilities are revealed.

In pursuing this form of inquiry, I considered several areas:

Entree

Since my observations which counter the dominant literature on "developmental" college readers and writers are based on my daily teaching experiences, it was appropriate that I begin this study by working with my students in a classroom setting. Early in the Fall 1997 semester, I presented my nascent proposal to the students in each of the three sections of Basic Education Program Reading 090 that I was teaching. I explained that I eventually hoped to focus my inquiry on individual students, but I asked for and received general permission to save student-created written documents and take fieldnotes of our experiences during the course of the semester. None of the students in any of the three classes exhibited any discernible signs of discomfort with my proposal; rather several expressed specific interest in my investigation. From time to time throughout the term,

my students and I discussed the study. In this notion of creating a specific portrait from a larger landscape, my work reflects the research theories of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). My initial access to my students and my potential collaborative relationship with them were contextualized and developed by our evolving relationships in our classrooms.

At the end of the semester, I met, as I always do, with each of my students individually to discuss his or her progress in our course and the course itself. At the end of these individual meetings, I asked four of my students (four of the first to participate in these individual conferences who said they would be returning to college for the Spring 1998 term) if they would be interested in participating directly in my inquiry. I read the tentative questions I hoped to explore and explained the methods I wanted to use to collect data. I asked each student to consider the potential inconveniences and intrusions that would be likely in sharing his or her story and life with me. I asked each student to discuss my proposed study with family and friends and to get back to me with a response one week later. Each student agreed to participate and met with me to reread and sign the consent form I created and had authorized by the college for this project (see Appendix A). During the January inter-session, however, one student decided not to return to college, so he and I agreed that he would withdraw from the study. At the start of the Spring 1998 term, I met another student from one of my Fall 1997 classes and asked him if he would be willing to participate. He explained that he remembered our conversations in class and would be glad to collaborate with me. After I reviewed with him the information that I had discussed in my earlier conversations with my other potential student-collaborators, I asked him to discuss the implications of his involvement with

family and friends. He did and a week later signed the consent form enthusiastically.

Thus, my four students and I began our individual studies.

Role Negotiation

Role negotiation continues to challenge me daily even after I have collected data, coded and analyzed it, and am writing this report of our investigation,. Yet it offers its richest rewards as well. While I know that it is I who have had the most to gain from this inquiry, I have been attempting to acknowledge the qualitative research paradigm's and my personal concern with reciprocity in a study such as the one I have been conducting. I knew from the outset that I needed to offer my students something in return for their participation beyond the opportunity for them to have their stories told and for these stories to have the potential to benefit other "developmental" college students. I explained this to my student-collaborators at the beginning of our investigation, and I still remind myself and them of this regularly. In return for their participation, I have offered my services as a mentor, tutor, advocate, cheerleader, or none of these as each of my students has seen, and continues to see, fit. However, since my original role in the lives of my students was that of a teacher, they (and even I) still tend to see me in this light. Over the course of our inquiry, they have sometimes seen themselves as accountable to me, and I have worried about this. I have offered them constant reassurance that this is not the case and explained that I have struggled to balance my role as a researcher with that of the various positions they may or may not have wanted me to assume. Obviously, ethical practice and continued access to my students have demanded that I remain sensitive to my students' varying needs and wishes.

However, encouraging my students to determine my varying roles in their lives has sometimes been difficult because my observations over the years prompt me to agree with Shaughnessy (1977) and Rose (1989) who see "developmental" college students as unfamiliar and often uncomfortable travelers through the course of college life. When I have sensed my students struggling to manage school, I have tended to assume the position of an ad hoc action researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This has compelled me to try to facilitate my students' negotiation of the academy even as I have strained to consider their wishes, respect their independence, and attempt scholarship for my own academic purposes.

Once again, I have been able to find in Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) corroboration of my ever-changing role in my student-collaborators' lives. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis share my view that my efforts at reciprocity have originated from more than the rigors of the qualitative paradigm. They see my desire to reciprocate as having grown from "a sense of respect, acceptance, and appreciation.... After all, the actor (their word for what I term "informant" or "collaborator") [has brought] his or her most precious resources-time, energy, experience, and wisdom...." (p. 153). These researchers consider it only appropriate that I have offered my students myself in return. They also agree with my observation that my students and I can find reciprocity on a personal level in the research process and the reflections it inspires in us, as well as in the responses it demands.

Data Collection

Interview.

The primary method of data collection in this inquiry has been the interview. By talking with my students on a regular basis in what can be considered "open-ended" or "unstructured" interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Kvale, 1996), I have gained insights into the capabilities my students created, employed, and continue to nurture through their navigation of their lives in and out of school. As our investigation has progressed, I have supplemented our frequent conversations with partially structured interviews based on my review of the recordings or transcripts I have made of our informal talks. These structured interviews have helped us to focus on specific responses to our investigation's guiding questions suggested by our prior discussions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Mason, 1996; Potter, 1996).

There is much research to support the interview as a primary means of data collection in an inquiry such as mine. Kvale (1996) sees it as a "construction site of knowledge" (p. 2), a form of conversation, a basic mode of human interaction through which I, as a researcher, have had the opportunity to "get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes, and the world they live in" (p. 5). He acknowledges it as a means to "obtain descriptions of the life and world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 6).

Bogdan and Biklen (1998), Kvale (1996), Spradley (1979), and Wolcott (1995) discuss the wealth of knowledge and insights about informants that can be gleaned from skillfully conducted interviews. They also offer strategies for researchers who collect data through this approach. I have followed their suggestion that I listen actively for

potentially significant data and seek clarification and elaboration of these data as they have been revealed through my conversations with my students. These researchers have also provided me with practical suggestions about questioning and responding including, for example, the simple repetition of the interviewee's last words as encouragement to continue. Such strategies have guided my conversations with my student-collaborators and the people they have asked me to interview on their behalf.

Participant observation.

In addition to the interview, I have employed other data collection methods common in qualitative study. I have accompanied my students to various sites and settings that they and I determined to be helpful in our research. Through this, I have observed them as they negotiate the many contexts of their lives. The specific places and events I have participated in with my students have varied among the group since the conditions of our collaboration were deliberately established to encourage my students to drive their individual inquiries.

In this aspect of my investigation, I have been continually trying to balance my participation and observation (Potter, 1996). There are complicated issues here in terms of observing, participating, and communicating (Mason, 1996), and, once again, issues of role negotiation have arisen during the course of each experience and from one situation to the next. As I have stated, I understand that my changing roles have been within my purview as a researcher (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997; Wolcott, 1995), but I have also tried to maintain a sensitivity to my students' comfort with my presence in specific settings. Obviously, my observation of and participation in my students' lives outside of the classroom is not a usual occurrence for them or me; therefore, I must acknowledge

that their interactions with others and me in different settings have been impacted by their awareness of my involvement. On the other hand, it would be ridiculous for them or me to attempt to ignore my presence in a setting. Over time, my students and I have grown more and more comfortable with each other; our responses to others and each other in different settings have reflected this. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis consider this common in qualitative research fieldwork.

Acquisition of artifacts.

Along with interviewing and shadowing my students, I have collected artifacts, particularly in terms of their written documents. During the initial semester of this investigation, each of my collaborators, as a student in one of my Reading Workshop sections, was required to write a minimum of fourteen different "letters" to me and to classmates about the reading, conversing, and reflecting we did throughout the term. I have all of these letters from my students, the responses they received to them from me or other students, and the fieldnotes I kept during the term. I have used these documents to provide evidence of my students' interests, ideas, and attitudes about a variety of issues which have emerged from their reading and writing.

Since that semester, I have been collecting a variety of written documents my students have created in response to other coursework and have been willing to share with me. In addition to this, my students have provided me with other artifacts, including photographs, videos, course assignment directions, copies of test questions, and others, solicited and unsolicited, that they and I have considered potentially useful in this inquiry.

I also have artifacts collected over the eleven years I have been teaching "developmental" college reading and writing. I have been reexamining these artifacts, including role books, plan books, student work, and writing I have done on my experiences, to help me acknowledge my autobiography and preoccupations, the sense of personal and professional history, based on which I engage in this investigation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Note-taking.

In conjunction with these various data collection methods, I have created fieldnotes and reflections of my ongoing experiences with my student-collaborators. During the initial semester of this inquiry, in the fall of 1998, I wrote during each class session about my class as a whole and about individual students and experiences. I examined these notes upon beginning my collaboration with my individual informants and used them as a means of guiding this inquiry. Over the course of the next year, whenever my student-collaborators and I got together, I responded in writing to the experience. I read these notes over as a way of debriefing from one meeting and preparing for the next. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Mason, 1996; Wolcott, 1995). These notes have been essential in helping me as a qualitative researcher, not only to describe what I observe, but to account for my role in this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis; Mason; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wolcott).

The Data Through My Eyes

My analysis of the data collected through the above methods has been continuous throughout the course of the investigation, driving further data collecting experiences and accounting for the stories I have written about my student-collaborators. Kvale (1996)

suggests the importance of analyzing interview data by seeking clarification and analysis of information during the course of individual interview sessions. Through the use of follow up questions during the course of the interviews in which issues of possible relevance emerged and in subsequent interviews, I have tried to make sense of data as I have obtained them.

I have coded the data each of my four collaborators and I have collected across the individual bodies of evidence through which each student is represented. As I have read and reread the hundreds of pages of transcripts of our conversations, fieldnotes, and written artifacts I have compiled, I have observed distinct, yet overlapping, categories emerge for each of them. I have used each set of data to paint individual portraits and employed the convergence to depict my students as a group.

This continuous examination of my data has implied the use of a loose form of the constant comparative method of research collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) common in qualitative study. This method has been applicable to my work in that my data collection has been ongoing for more than eighteen months (incorporating the three semesters for which I obtained permission from the college to conduct my study). The various methods employed in collecting these data and their continuing analysis have helped me to present the "thin" or direct description and create the "thick" or interpreted description afforded by the "layered" data inherent to portraiture as a mode of qualitative research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Actually, portraiture as a mode of qualitative inquiry encourages this even as it acknowledges that these data offer evidence to counter the themes that emerge in their analysis. As I have been listening for my students' voices,

I have considered any discordance with or divergence from the emerging themes. In observing such contrasts within the larger frames, I share Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' belief that such voices have served to broaden, rather than limit, the portraits I offer in these pages.

Moreover, I have been mindful of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) suggestion that I develop and enhance my "theoretical sensitivity" (p. 76) to help me make meaning of the data through which I "ground" my theory (Potter, 1996) about my students and the competencies they offer us in and beyond the academy. I have been continuously reviewing both the "technical," or previously published literature in the field, and the "nontechnical," or primary source documents, created by my informants and me. Through my reading, I have been encouraged to question what I have observed, both in the literature and in the field, in order to create a firm footing for the theory I have developed (Strauss & Corbin).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' (1997) views on data analysis and presentation in portraiture as a model within the qualitative paradigm have guided me throughout my investigation. I have been aware that in these, as in all aspects of this mode of inquiry, "the voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative" (p. 85). At the same time, I have been mindful of the empirical nature of portraiture and present my portraits confident of their foundation in "systematically collected data,... [which has sustained] questioning (of self and [informants]), and ... the examination of biases" (p. 85).

I know that I have both privilege and obligation, freedom and responsibility in painting my students' portraits through my accounts of their stories. Who I am as a person, teacher, and researcher has been intrinsic to the representations I have created in collaboration with my students. At the same time, my students and I believe that a glimpse of who my students are as they negotiate their way through college is presented in each of the next four chapters of this report of our investigation. It is our belief too that their stories, individually and collectively as they are discussed in Chapter 6, have much to offer the field. They present a broader perspective of the "developmental" college reader and writer than that previously available.

My Place in This Scheme: A Brief Autobiographical Picture

While my study is the carefully planned outgrowth of my years in the college classroom, there was very little deliberation involved in my plunge into this field. When I answered my phone on the Sunday morning after Labor Day in September 1987, I was greeted by the voice of the chair of the Reading Department at Island Community College, a large school located a few miles from my home. He had been given my name by a friend of mine, who was a math instructor in the brand new college-preparatory program established under the auspices of the Reading Department. Dr. Gibbs explained that a section of the "developmental" English (writing) component of this program had been in session for three days without a teacher, and my friend had recommended me as a potential instructor for this class. Dr. Gibbs described the program, the course, and its students to me over the phone, and we arranged a meeting for the following morning. Within 24 hours of our initial phone call, I took the position of adjunct instructor in the

Basic Education Program of the Reading Department of the college. I've been a faculty member in this department ever since.

Despite the fortuitousness of my introduction to my work at the college, it is, in fact, a natural evolution of my personal and professional life. I am the oldest of six children. Although my parents did not attend college, it was a given that all of us would pursue academic courses of study leading to baccalaureate degrees. My parents made all their decisions with this goal in mind. They left the security of their city neighborhood and moved to suburbia because they believed, like many parents of "baby boomers," that to do so would afford their children better educational opportunities. Perhaps because they had always attended public schools, they sent us to private academies and monitored our progress through them very closely. Ultimately, my parents fulfilled their dreams for their children; all six of us hold degrees.

I attended college during the tumultuous late 60s, graduating on the heels of the Kent State riots and subsequent shutdowns of college campuses. The causes espoused by my idealistic generation, particularly a vehement opposition to the war in Vietnam and a strong commitment to the Civil Rights Movement, framed my philosophy as a young adult even though they never managed to intrude for too long into my insulated world. I married my best friend, and we grew up together as we attempted to raise children of our own. We still live in the ethnically, socio-economically, and racially diverse, yet predominantly white, upper-middle-class community where I grew up.

I've worked all of my adult years in one or another teaching capacity. When our children were small, I did so for a limited number of hours each week outside our home, but I also volunteered in various aspects of my children's school experiences. Academic

pursuits have remained for me, as a person and a professional, the priority they were established to be in my childhood. At the same time, I acknowledge that I have always considered educational opportunities within the contexts provided by the comfortable circumstances of my life.

In listening for my students' voices while painting their portraits, I have been able to explore the diverse capabilities all individuals, including those deemed "underprepared," bring with them to school. I look forward to sharing my findings with the readers of this report. It is my belief that my students' stories will secure their membership in the college community.

CHAPTER 2

"Beating the Odds" or

How a Tree Grows in Brooklyn:

The Story of Marcus Prince

Entree

I anxiously surveyed my students as they assembled for our class on the first day of the Fall 1997 semester. I was unsure of myself because I would be introducing our department's new curriculum for our Reading 090 course; we would be adapting Henry's (1995) adaptation of Atwell's (1987, 1998) Reading Workshop. Each student and teacher in our classes would spend the semester selecting individual books, reading those books, conversing in class, and corresponding with each other about our books and the issues they raised.

Workshop is a completely different approach to this developmental, non-credit bearing course from the skills-based program we were used to. Our goal was to create an environment in which our students might enjoy reading and the books they read, often for the first time in their lives (Henry, 1995; Erwin, 1990; Duchein & Mealey, 1993). The responsibility for the course's success or failure rested squarely on the shoulders of the individuals in the class, students and teacher alike. I was anxious to start off on the right foot with my new students and enfranchise them to our class' efforts as soon as possible. To this end, I welcomed the entering freshmen. Eventually there were fifteen present that day: eleven men and four women, mostly recent high school graduates, but there were a couple who had worked for a few years and one woman about to become a grandmother.

Among this group, Marcus' presence was undeniable. Actually, he, and what almost seemed like his entourage of several well-built, athletic types, sauntered in about five minutes after the hour. The rest of us had already taken seats in the circle of desks I had arranged before the class session. When he entered, the entire doorway was filled. From my seated position, I had to look straight up to make eye contact with him. He grinned at me and interrupted his own conversation to apologize for his lateness. Marcus stood well over six and a half feet tall, and he had to weigh close to 350 pounds. He was pretty much the largest student I had ever met. Everyone in the room seemed instantly drawn to his stature. His size and his demeanor were appealing, and I sensed curiosity among us all.

He and his companions sat in the circle, and we began. We weren't far into our introductions when my first impressions were confirmed: This class included seven of the college's football players, a particularly large number of one of the school's most highly recognized groups. Since I regularly taught "players," I was prepared for "Tree." I wasn't surprised that Marcus bore the obvious, but charming, sobriquet that had evolved from "Sequoia," his original nickname. Many of the football players were known by aliases, often coined by their teammates, based on one or another of their athletic characteristics. This seemed to be part of their collective identity. I looked forward to getting to know these "players" and all my new students through Reading Workshop.

At that initial meeting, I mentioned this inquiry as potentially growing from within the class, and several students expressed interest and asked about my plans. My fieldnotes confirm that Tree was among those curious right from the outset. Early in the

term, he leaned over from his desk to mine and proclaimed to the group what they already knew: "She's taking notes about our conversation. It's real!"

My notes reflect Tree's continued interest in the activities of our class, despite his absence of several days when his grandmother, who lived in Georgia, died. He and his family traveled there to attend her funeral and tend to her estate. Upon his return, Tree seemed slightly disoriented and quite mournful.

The interruption in Tree's semester also took its toll on his season. He and the coach determined that it would be in their mutual interest for Tree to begin his two officially-permitted years on the team the following season. In effect, Tree became a "red-shirted" player, a practice common among "serious" football schools. According to the N.C.A.A., athletes are allowed to play four out of their first five years of college. By sitting out, Tree allowed himself time to mature and strengthen his skills as an athlete and a student, encouraging his potential success on the football field and in the college classroom.

Even though he withdrew from the team, Tree remained an integral member of the group of players. He also became an articulate, enthusiastic leader of our entire class as he shared his insights on subjects ranging from the misdeeds of professional athletes to the possibility of a purely spiritual existence.

When I examine my notes from that term, I see that Tree's name appears consistently. I observed on several occasions that he kept our class flowing, reminding me of conversations we needed to continue from session to session and engaging, not only himself, but also his classmates, with his thoughtful reflections and questions about issues raised by our reading. Despite occasional shortfalls in meeting deadlines on

assignments, Tree passed the course and did well enough on the departmentally administered standardized exit test, the Degrees of Reading Power,³ to skip the next course in the preparatory sequence and enroll in Reading 002, a strategy-building reading course, which was the last in the sequence of non-credit bearing reading courses mandated by the college.

At our end-of-the-semester individual conference, I discussed with Tree his progress and the course itself; then I shook hands with him in conclusion. As he was exiting, I asked him if he would be interested in participating in my investigation. He sat back down at our conference table, and we talked about what would be entailed. Despite his expressed agreement at the end of that conversation, I insisted he consider my request over a week or so and discuss it with his family. He later signed the consent form which I had prepared in compliance with the college's policy for faculty research with students.

At the time, I felt that I had asked Tree to work with me quite simply because our conference was among the first scheduled that last week of the fall term. When I look back over the notes of our classroom experiences, I see that Tree, despite his absences and inconsistent completion of homework tasks, was an asset to our group. I realize now that I was drawn to him, not merely because of his stature (which never ceased to amaze us all), but because his presence in class was always much more than physical.

Getting to Know Tree

The apprehension I felt the first day of the fall semester was rivaled by my trepidation as I approached the college's library complex for my meeting with Tree during the January inter-session of 1998. Doubts tumbled through my head as I tried to spot him among the group of people heading across the plaza and into the entrances of the various

buildings that converged onto that cold, concrete-bound space. It wasn't long before I saw Tree standing, just as his name implies, above everyone else. We waved and joined each other, exchanging greetings as we settled into our seats across a table in the library's nearly-empty main reading room. I wondered how to begin, feeling shy in the presence of the student I had grown comfortable with the semester before. He put me quickly at ease, however, when I couldn't get my new tape recorder to work. He took it into his hands, examined it, and then asked, "Where are the directions? There must be directions." I handed him the booklet I had just unpacked with the recorder, and he soon had the tape flowing smoothly.

The matter-of-fact approach he took to addressing my several levels of awkwardness broke the ice, and we started talking. I reminded him of our study's guiding questions which we had reviewed earlier; then he considered my initial query: "Why did you agree to participate in my investigation? Why did you want to do this?"

"It's something for me to do.... It will take most of the stress off of me, help keep me motivated." When I pursued this a bit, Tree explained that he saw our work as a "two way thing." He felt that I might serve a purpose in his life in school. As I reflect on our time together, I see evidence to support Tree's prediction about the reciprocal nature of our work.

Tree's Family Background

From months of weekly or twice-weekly conversations with Tree, from talking with his mom and his sister Betty, as well as his friends Kevin and "Ceez," I've learned much about Tree's life and family background. Marcus Prince was born in 1978, nine years after the youngest of his four older sisters, in an inner-city neighborhood he

describes as "one of the worst in the metropolitan area, in the state, in America... the ghetto." Tree's birth was a difficult one, perhaps because he weighed twelve and a half pounds, and his mother's health was jeopardized, forcing her to be confined to bed rest for a month afterward. Because Tree's mom was single and raising her children on her own, this was particularly hard.

Nevertheless, his arrival was celebrated enthusiastically since he was the first male in a family of five women. Tree's mom told me that his size, even then, was so compelling that her doctors predicted he'd be the "first black president of the United States." His sisters, too, were taken with his stature. When he was a little boy, they made a game of chasing him until he was caught and then tackling him. Tree and his sisters say that they still wrestle with each other. Tree often "loses" these physical bouts but not the laughing repartees in which they end.

Actually, Tree's sisters played more than a sparring role in his life. His mother explained that she returned to work when he was just a year old, so, in her view, for the most part, his sisters "raised" him. According to Ms. Prince, his sister, Betty, is still trying to raise him. Betty seeks Tree's company, and he spends a great deal of his time at Betty and her husband, Teddy's, home. Betty explained that she thoroughly enjoys being with Tree and that she and Teddy "stay on him" to do well in school and remain free of the social problems rampant in his neighborhood. He passes many evenings and weekends with Betty and Teddy, watching movies, playing on their computer, and enjoying their conversation.

Perhaps because Tree appreciated the models provided by his sisters, he, too, plays an active role in child-rearing in his family. For several years he and his mom have

shared their home with Tree's nephews, who were about thirteen and six years old during the course of our inquiry. In addition, his ten year old nephew is an almost daily guest. Tree serves as a mentor, particularly to six year old Andy, who Tree's mom says "looks up to him." He is currently teaching Andy to "bang the drums," a hobby of Tree's he uses to worship during the services of the Pentecostal Christian church he and his family attend.

Tree's religious life seems important to him. He spoke frequently about his courses in religious studies growing up and about his views on the relationship between morality and religion. Tree believes in a strong, but merciful, God, who forgives just about any wrongdoing. Tree is anxious to contemplate issues related to spirituality, and he explained that he's gotten into several debates with acquaintances at the college about religion. He stated that he feels comfortable discussing his faith because of his strong background in Scripture study, which he pursued throughout the course of our inquiry. He even spoke to his congregation at a Mother's Day service when his mom volunteered him to present his ideas on the relationship between mothers and children. His religious beliefs are closely aligned with his bond to his family.

While it is clear that Tree's sisters and their families are an integral part of Tree's life, his closest relationship is the one he shares with his mother. He credits his mother with his general well-being. Although he explained that she did not attend college herself, he sees her as responsible for his presence in college as well as for his ability to stay alive and out of danger in a neighborhood where young men are particularly vulnerable.

I thank God for my moms for real because if it wasn't for her, I don't think I'd be here today... because there's so much peer pressure where I'm from.... Oh man, if I lost my mom, I think I would bug out, they would have to just put me... man, I'm telling you I would flip. I don't know what I'd do. I want my mom to be old, I want her to see my kids go to college at least. Or at least let her see me become somebody.

Frequently in the many months we have spent together, Tree has reiterated and elaborated upon these sentiments. He sees his mom as his strongest champion and the unifying force in his family. It is her spiritual and physical strength that holds the group together in spite of any difficulties they face in their daily lives outside their home.

Tree also expressed his appreciation of the male role models in his life: his step-father, Mr. Chester; his "uncle," Bishop Allen; and his brother-in-law, Teddy. He sees each of these as influential. He explained that Mr. Chester, who entered his family quite recently, makes his mom happier than he remembers her ever being before. He finds his step-dad interested in and supportive of him as well. Tree has known Bishop Allen all his life; his mom and his uncle are not actually related but have been friends for many years. Bishop Allen is a clergyman who also owns a refrigeration business. Tree has worked in this business for the last several years, learning the complicated procedures involved in the installation and maintenance of air conditioning and refrigeration systems. Tree also appreciates his relationship with his brother-in-law, Teddy, and frequently accompanies him on his routes throughout Brooklyn, where he works as a bus driver for the Metropolitan Transit Bureau.

Of his biological father, Tree has little to say except that he learned early not to depend on the man who was never really a part of his life. When I attempted to question Tree about his feelings on his relationship with his father, he seemed reluctant to pursue the conversation beyond telling me that he gets his size from his father.

Tree spoke with great fondness of the role his grandparents played in his childhood, explaining that even though they lived in Georgia, they would come to New York and spend time with his family or he would go "down South" in the summer. Tree credits these summers with, at least, his physical growth. "Yup, that's why I'm so big... Georgia food!" He also explained that his grandfather would sit and read the newspaper with him and his cousin. His grandfather would read a paragraph; then each of the grandchildren would take a turn. These memories seem to please Tree.

In our conversations, Tree repeatedly expressed his gratitude toward his family for the encouragement they offer him in his pursuit of college. "It's like a dream in my family for me to graduate from college," he said to explain his presence in school. Once again, Tree cited his mother as his strongest supporter. He contrasted the effectiveness of his mother's advocacy with that of the mother of a friend killed in a drug deal gone bad.

His mother, she is not as strong as my moms is. That's what that is. My moms was strict. His mom wasn't that strict on him.... My moms, she stayed on my back, she made me stay in school, you know what I'm saying. I thank God for my moms, because if my moms wasn't like she was, I would probably end up dead too. God forbid. Because knowing me, I probably would have followed him. You know what I am saying. Because me and him was so close, so who knows what I'd have done.

Tree sees his mom as facilitating his personal well-being as well as his academic progress. He appreciates that she has managed this under the often trying circumstances of single parenthood. He also believes in the importance of male role models in the life of young children, which may be why he mentioned several times throughout the course of this inquiry his desire to ground a family of his own in a strong union with a spouse. He wrote an essay for his English class on this subject in which he stated, "Finding love with someone is most important. It's like finding a part of yourself. Two people that are comfortable with each other is what everyone wants. After you've found love and you feel it's about time to tie the knot, marriage can last a lifetime if both parties make it work for them."

Tree described the "perfect wife." He said, "I need a partner, you know what I'm saying.... I don't want no quiet wife." He elaborated on this notion on several occasions, speaking about the importance of cooperating with each other and of the need for him to be "involved with [his] children.... Fathers teach children culture and ideas."

Tree's Community

While Tree is adamant that he prefers life in the city to that of a rural environment like his grandparents' community, stories of problems in Tree's New York City neighborhood arose frequently during our conversations. Despite the efforts of his mom and family to keep Tree literally inside his home away from the influences of the street, he has learned much about what he calls, "life in the ghetto." While he was willing to talk with me about his local community, he would not share it. He announced early in our inquiry that I was welcome to call his mom and sisters, but that he would never invite me to his home. "You'd bug out if you saw where I lived," he said to me one day. When

he joined our family for supper at our home for the first time, he reiterated his discomfort with my entering what he called the "project," that is his apartment house. In reference to my home, he said, "This is like a miracle compared to where I live. This is what I want for me and my family."

My curiosity about Tree's views of his neighborhood compared with mine prompted me to ask him to describe his urban community in a bit more detail. "I guess you could say that... everyday something happens. It's nonstop violence." When I asked him why he thought this was so, he said,

Because everybody is squashed together.... I don't know. It's always that situation if you live in a project instead of a house. If you live in a project, you always got to see different people, deal with different kinds of people everyday. I don't know; Chris, I just know it's bad in [my neighborhood].... I [live] in the heart of the action... where people get killed... shoot-outs, all that.

During the course of our investigation, Tree and his family moved from the apartment he had lived in his whole life to a three family house in a neighboring area. His sister, Jennifer, arranged for this move onto the same block where she has lived for the last few years, which is also within walking distance of Betty and Teddy's home. Tree explained that his family has the second floor and that the apartment has a porch. "Now you can come to my house, Chris. Before, no. That's why I never had girls over to my crib," he explained. Tree sees his new community as "more calm and collected" than his former area. Even though he knows few people in his new neighborhood, Tree enjoys sitting outside and watching the daily comings and goings of his neighbors. "I sit on the porch and absorb the fresh air," Tree commented in appreciation of his new surroundings.

While it is obvious that his former urban neighborhood troubled Tree, he managed to negotiate his life within it. He also navigates his way in the suburban environment in which he attends college and in the community of the college itself. On several occasions, he explained his coping mechanisms and pointed out the contrasts between customary responses to ordinary situations in his former home community and on our college campus.

His main strategy for dealing with his local community was to avoid the social scene since it was fraught with violence. He said that it was too dangerous to hang around outside, so his family members became his main companions. To explain this, Tree said, "I don't be doing nothing all weekend; I be just chilling. I've been doing that since I [was] a little boy." When I asked him why, he replied, "A lot of people I grew up with, a lot of my best friends got killed...." In reference to one of them, he elaborated,

Me and he say we were cousins because when we were little, my mom used to have me go to his house, because his uncle baby-sat me. We were always together and all that. He got like around 15, 16 age period... a little bit younger, probably 14, he started selling drugs. And he got real big; I mean he had cars and all that.... I mean he had a problem... and seven guys in black came and got him. And my mom seen it out the window. They had him and killed him and cut his thumb off. Took his beeper and mailed it to his mother.

When I expressed my horror, he said,

Yup, I think about it everyday.... I think that it is kind of like an inspiration for me. I use that to inspire me because we went our separate ways. We grew up together; then we just went apart. We stopped speaking to each other and

everything. I would say "what's up?" to him, but I wouldn't stop there and have a conversation with him. It's like we really didn't know each other, but we grew up together.

I asked him why he went one way and his friend another, and it was then that Tree told me it was because of his mother's influence, a view he reiterated often during our conversations.

Despite Tree's reluctance to become involved in the local social scene, he stated that there were times growing up when he was forced to do so. He noted that in his old neighborhood,

If a guy don't like me for any reason at all and wants to fight, I have to fight him because I live in [this area], and [his neighbors] would consider me a punk..., and I'd have to live with that for the rest of my life. So I have to fight him in front of them, and then when I see him one on one, I'd pull him over [and say], "yo, was that really necessary?" or whatever. Because that's just me because I don't like fighting or holding grudges, but in public, I have to fight.... I hate to say it, but the people in [his new neighborhood] got more sense than the people in [his old], and out here [at the college], it's even better than [in his new community].

Tree said that on the college campus, he'd talk out any differences. "The atmosphere [on campus] is different.... I mean the people are more educated and have more sense. In [his old neighborhood], a lot of crazy people live in that area. In the projects, people are bunched against each other, and they need more space."

Tree's Friendships

In spite of Tree's limited involvement in his neighborhood, he, his mom, and his sister, Betty, told me about his strong friendship with his neighbor, Kevin. This young man was a friend of Tree's throughout their childhood, often staying at Tree's home overnight and on weekends. Tree's mom noted, "Kevin has clothes in Tree's closet," to inform me of the young men's closeness growing up. After high school, Kevin went to a community college but dropped out and is working at various jobs including that of a deejay. Tree observed that Kevin's mom did not encourage him the way his own did as explanation of Kevin's withdrawal from college. Yet Tree and Kevin have managed to maintain a close relationship despite their different circumstances.

One night, following a conversation Tree and I had about Kevin, Tree called. He wanted me to hear Kevin's view of their friendship. I was grateful for Tree's initiative and spoke with Kevin for quite a while. We talked through the background laughter and shouts of Tree and his nephews' animated video game contests. Kevin told me that growing up with Tree "was like a big adventure. Everyday was something new. We were either laughing or crying or dreaming." He explained that while they shared many good times and reveries of sports-filled lives, they also supported each other through the destruction of their neighborhood. Kevin said that there were approximately 25 adolescent males who entered junior high school with them from their "project," and by the time they were finishing high school, only about ten remained. The rest had died, gone to jail, or left school due to one problem or another.

Kevin attributed his and Tree's ability to avoid a variety of dangerous circumstances to their mothers' efforts. He said of Tree's mom, "She's totally outspoken.

She'd do whatever it takes [to insure Tree and Kevin's well-being.]" Kevin elaborated, "you know that saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child,' that's what it was like between our families." Recently, Kevin, his mom, and his younger sister have moved from their apartment in the same "project" that was home to the Princes to another of the three family homes on Tree's family's street in their new neighborhood. Actually, Kevin's family now lives directly next door to Tree's sister, Jennifer. Tree said that his sister had helped Kevin's family find their new home in much the same way as she had helped the Princes.

Kevin also observed that he and Tree went together "like cheese and bread," and expressed his gratitude for Tree's continued friendship. "Sometimes I ask him stuff like about God, life. I hear stuff in songs, and Tree'll be like all concrete. He'll say, 'that ain't right. The Bible don't say that.'" Kevin really seems appreciative of Tree's ideas. He said that it helped him "understand and sort things out."

Tree's friendships extend beyond his neighborhood to the college campus. Through my several observations of Tree's various football related activities, I have witnessed many of his exchanges with his teammates and heard about several others. During the first half of the Spring 1998 term, we met weekly in the basement of the college's physical education complex. We'd sit on a bench and talk or go over school work. Our conversations were often interrupted by teammates or other athletes, male and female. "Yo, man, what's up?" became a running sentence in the transcriptions I have of these meetings. It seemed that everyone who passed through those halls knew Tree and was glad to see him. Despite the interruptions caused by this corridor traffic, it served to confirm my view of Tree's affable demeanor.

Tree spoke about two of his teammates with whom he became particularly close: Benny, an old friend from his former neighborhood and Ceez, a fellow city dweller he met for the first time at college. For several months during the course of our inquiry, Tree drove to school and back home with either or both of these young men and so spent a great deal of time with them.

Tree asked me to talk with Ceez about their friendship. At our introduction, I asked Ceez why he was friends with Tree. "His personality," he responded. "Since the fall I've been hanging out with him every day. Me and him is closer than anybody else.... He's real cool, real cool. So on weekends we hang out too.... He's just mad cool; I like having him around." He said that he admired Tree "for keeping it real" and for his sense of loyalty. He explained that Tree had talked frankly with him about football, women, mutual acquaintances, and his affection for his family, particularly his mom. He mentioned that Tree often spoke of his desire for his family to live in a comfortable neighborhood and enjoy financial security.

Ceez observed that Tree's personality and concerns carried over to situations with the team. "If they have any problems on campus, they [the football players] probably run and get Tree first; he's the biggest; he's got the biggest mouth. He'll talk you out of anything, you know,... and he'll tell you to your face what he thinks about you."

Ceez cited an incident to illustrate his point:

We had a little trouble with some kids on campus about a month ago; they started picking on one of the small kids on our team.... Tree found out, and he doesn't like that too much, you know. So Tree stepped up to them by himself, one man against twelve of them, and he had the whole crew scared. They got in their cars

and left and drove away.... [From this] everybody thinks Tree's a big, tough guy. Nobody really knows Tree like I do. I know a little more.... I know he has feelings.... I know when he stepped on those cats, he was probably scared... he just felt it was right; he felt they were wrong to step up to a smaller friend, so he just did it. He's a normal person, but everybody thinks he is above normal.

Ceez explained that while these types of situations tend to confront Tree because of his size, Tree is not oblivious to their potential danger but overcomes a realistic sense of fear to deal with them. Ceez sees Tree, not as a big, tough guy who uses his body to bully his way around campus, but as a loyal friend and teammate, willing to assume responsibility for his friends' well-being when he considers it necessary.

I asked Tree about the incident Ceez described. He said that while he'd gotten into his share of skirmishes growing up, at this point it upsets him to fight. He commented, "I don't get no cool points for that."

This attitude of Tree's was confirmed much later in the semester when he arrived very upset for one of our meetings and asked me if I had heard about "the fight." When I replied that I hadn't, he related a story of a disagreement he had gotten into with one of his teammates that ended up in punches. His two buddies, Ceez and Benny, had broken up the brawl and calmed the angry fighters. Tree said, "I felt terrible afterwards." He told me that even though he and the other guy hugged, he still was uncomfortable about what had happened. He said that several other teammates mentioned the incident to him, adding to his upset feelings. When I questioned him a bit further, it seemed clear to me that Tree's anger had been provoked by the other man's inappropriate remarks. This

offered Tree little comfort; he regretted his physical involvement in the incident. It was out of character with his views of how to negotiate life on campus.

Tree's Schooling

Elementary school.

Many of the conversations Tree and I have shared have been focused on issues relating to school. While he has spoken little about elementary school, his mom mentioned that he had gone to two neighborhood public schools and done well. Actually, Tree was forced to repeat the fourth grade, a situation his mom did not mention and Tree told me about only after we'd been meeting for almost a year. He explained that he "failed" a city-wide "reading test," so he repeated the grade at an elementary school different from the one he attended before and after that year. When I asked Tree about his memories of grammar school, he mentioned that when he was in fifth grade, he used to be responsible for bringing his nephew, Andy, a kindergartner, to and from school with him.

When I think about Tree's experiences in elementary school, I am struck by the potential difficulty that his stature may have caused him. His birthday is in September, making him quite young among his peers. On the other hand, his height and weight were always that of a much older child. It makes me wonder if this disparity may possibly have impacted on his elementary school teachers' evaluations of his performance.

Junior high.

Tree had much more to say about his junior high and high school experiences. Although he tried to please his mother, who constantly stressed the importance of excelling in school, he explained that he really did not take his academic obligations seriously. In junior high, he was considered somewhat of a trouble maker, perhaps

because, as he says, "I was the biggest one in my junior high," and his size created a challenge for other adolescents anxious to exhibit bravado. He said that he and his "cousin" Kevin would get into fights and end up in the principal's office. "We called her 'pitbull,'" Tree remembered, and he also reminisced about the way the principal instructed him to use his presence as a role model rather than a challenge. Of these episodes, Tree concluded, "It's stupid. I mean we were young. It was something to do." He seemed chagrined rather than amused by his memories of junior high.

High school.

Tree began high school in a graphic arts school located quite a distance from his home. He entered the school because he loved to draw when he was young; however, getting to that school required him to leave his home at 6 a.m. to be there by 8. Also, Tree's ever-growing size prompted his interest in football. The school did not have a football team, so in the middle of his sophomore year, he transferred to a school much closer to his home, but not the school attended by the majority of his neighbors. He explained that his local school was particularly problematic, and his mother made certain he enrolled in a stronger institution. Tree graduated from that school in the June of 1997.

When I asked Tree about his time at his second high school, he emphasized his social experiences. He explained that he often missed class in order to spend his day in the cafeteria, talking with friends and flirting with girls. He said that he would stay in the lunchroom socializing, playing cards, and avoiding teachers. He and his friends developed strategies to hide their presence in school so that class time would not interfere with their good time.

The only subject Tree tried not to miss was Dr. Howe's math class. This teacher would enter the cafeteria looking for missing students and search until he located them. According to Tree, Dr. Howe. would say, "Don't you know it's my class time right now?" Tree said,

So I made sure I went to his class because he came into the lunch room and got you out of there. I admired him, because if he was a regular teacher, he wouldn't have cared. If you were in the lunchroom, [the other teachers] were like, "whatever, you want to stay in the lunch room, whatever." My final grade from Dr. Howe was an 85.

He went on to say that Dr. Howe was great with jokes and classroom stories, but that he took his work "to heart." The realization of this influenced Tree to do the same, at least in that class.

Tree had other stories to relate about high school. He remembers reading Shakespeare and Arthur Miller in English and listening to various musical styles in his general music class, as well as learning about plant life in his horticulture class, but most of his reminiscences focused on intrigue that occurred between and among students, in and out of class, and on his football team. Tree could not remember, or was unwilling to discuss, many specifics about his academic performance. He knew that he did not do well on one or more of his Regents, exams administered by the state of New York to indicate proficiency in high school coursework. Because of this, he holds a local rather than Regents diploma. When I asked him if there were any teachers he wanted me to talk with about him as part of this inquiry, he replied that there were not.

One aspect of school life that Tree discussed quite animatedly, however, was his experience taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). He needed a score of 910 points to be eligible to play Division I football in college. Although he took the SATs three times in his senior year, he did not attain the score. He explained that this memory is a particularly bitter one because of a mix up that occurred over the December test. There was a problem with his paper work, and he was not permitted to sit for that test despite his mother's arrival at the testing site and intervention on his behalf. Tree remembers that his mom tried very hard to convince the administrators to allow her son to take the test. Both mother and son were upset and disappointed when he was not granted permission.

In spite of his problems with this standardized test, Tree sees himself as a good test taker. He explained that his teachers in high school were often startled by his performance on tests, considering his chronic absenteeism. He said that his teachers would comment, "Tree, you have a thousand absences. But from what I see here [in the grade books], you are passing your tests. If you just come to class, I swear I'll pass you. From what I hear, I have to pass you; you are passing your tests."

Tree also spoke about his experiences on his school's varsity football team. He explained that he had never played junior varsity and that he had never played football prior to his transfer to his second high school. His size secured him a spot on the team's offensive line and a second look from the college's football coach when he visited the high school to recruit one of Tree's teammates. Ultimately, football played a substantial role in Tree's decision to attend our community college.

Life in college.

While I have attempted to explore many aspects of Tree's life through this inquiry, I have become most involved in Tree's life in college, starting with his first semester. Despite the discontinuity he faced due to his extended absence at the time of his grandmother's death, his English professor and I shared the belief that our classes were better places for all, students and teachers alike, because Tree was among us.

When I examine our correspondence during that term, as well as that he shared with fellow students, I am reminded of the many issues he encouraged our class to consider. Tree read and reflected on books which dealt with the concepts of independence, loyalty, and integrity among others. Moreover, when he read John Grisham's A Time to Kill, his remarks prompted debates about the implications of race in America and the notion of justifiable anger versus revenge.

Since that semester, I have worked very closely with Tree and observed his negotiation of his academic and athletic life on the college campus. Setting priorities and managing time continue to challenge him and, to some extent, impact on his progress in school. During the Spring 1998 term, which followed the one when Tree was a student in my class, he struggled with attendance and with completion of course requirements. On a practical level, it was difficult for him to commute to school during the winter months, for he would often anticipate a ride from a friend or teammate only to find out at the last minute that the driver was not making the trip to college that day. By then it would be too late for Tree to seek public transportation. Not only is public transportation costly at \$5.25 each way, but it is time consuming. To get to the college from Tree's home, he has to walk six blocks from his home to the subway, ride the subway to the railroad, take the

railroad to a station about a third of the way to the school, transfer to another train, and ride that train to a stop near a bus terminal in a community neighboring the college and then ride a public bus to the campus. If everything works right, the 25 mile trip takes two hours.

Tree also had two classes that semester which met for extended time periods only on Fridays. When he did not attend those classes, he missed an entire week's worth of work. This happened on several occasions, upsetting him, his teachers, and me because he found it difficult to play "catch up" repeatedly.

In spite of his shortcomings, which were actually quite similar to problems I observed first hand when he was a student in my class, Tree told enthusiastic stories about each of his classes. He talked about many of the playwrights he encountered in his African American theater class, and he was particularly taken with Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun. He compared the characters and their situation to that of his own family. "I felt like how a lot of black families are in situations like that... not just in that part of town, that time period and that area. My family is similar to that ... 'cause my mother is like the backbone of the family."

Tree wrote a reaction paper to Hansberry's play in which he elaborated upon the similarities between the character of the grandmother in the play and his mother.

[They] were very alike, highly spiritual and doing everything possible to make [their] family happy. My mom is a very strong woman like the grandmother in the play.... In Act II when the grandmother gave her son ... the money for his share in the liquor store, that's something my mom would do. That's something most moms would do to keep the family together.

He concluded his paper by remarking, "I really enjoyed this play. If the rest of the semester's plays [are] as good as this one, I'll have a ball in class."

Tree's enthusiasm for his African American theater class prompted me to observe his oral presentation on Paul Robeson, an assignment he completed as a course requirement. Tree investigated Robeson enthusiastically and was quite impressed with the actor's accomplishments, which, as Tree observed, extended well beyond theatrical matters. He outlined the information he wanted to present about the man he termed, "an American icon" on index cards because he wanted to feel confident when lecturing his class.

When I arrived at the assigned classroom on the day of the presentation, I found Tree, dressed in a plaid sport shirt, khaki slacks, and his new boots, sitting on a bench outside the classroom, reviewing his note cards. I complimented his "dressed up" appearance and reassured him of his preparation for this project; then we went inside. Tree was the fourth presenter of the afternoon. He seemed quite interested in the various students who spoke before him, asking questions and participating in their discussions. From time to time, however, he glanced down at his cards, I assume, in anticipation of his turn in front of the class.

Tree began his presentation by introducing himself as "Marcus Prince," then encouraging an appreciative chuckle from his classmates by adding, "Some people call me 'Tree.'" His professor interjected, "For obvious reasons." Tree seemed grateful for Professor Burns' friendly comment and appeared to relax a bit. The thoroughness of his report required that he speak for several minutes. As he did so, he interrupted himself with remarks like, "Let me collect my thoughts; I'm a little bit nervous," or "I'm mad

nervous." The class laughed out loud when he said, "My bad for boring you all."

Teacher and students alike reassured him of their interest in what he had to say.

After he finished, Tree fielded a few questions about Robeson, looking to his professor for confirmation of his answers. When she nodded in agreement with what he was saying, he seemed visibly relieved. His classmates, teacher, and I applauded appreciatively at the conclusion of his presentation. When he resumed his seat, he looked over at me, and I slipped him a congratulatory note. After settling into a relaxed position in his chair, he turned his attention to the next presenter. He maintained his role as an active audience participant for the remainder of the three and a half hour class session.

The enthusiasm with which Tree participated in this class on the Fridays he actually attended it facilitated his ultimate success in this course. Despite his attendance issues, he earned a B+ course grade and three credits toward graduation.

Tree's other Friday class was Reading 002, the last course in the college's non-credit, preparatory sequence. This course offers an introduction to and practice in using reading and study strategies to negotiate college coursework and textbooks. Tree was once again forced to play "catch up" all semester due to his poor attendance. He would often come to me to discuss topics he had missed and to review his assignments. Since I was particularly interested in Tree's progress in this course, which was quite different from our reading class, I got permission to observe the class.

I visited on a cold, dreary February morning. Tree was actually feeling sick that day; he had a headache and chills. However, he participated animatedly in the class' activities. He asked for clarification of upcoming assignments and volunteered answers to questions posed by his teacher in reference to the day's lesson on paraphrasing. Much

of the class was spent working in small groups, rewording a fairy tale, "The Frog Prince" in "politically correct" language. Tree made several contributions to the passage assigned to his group, leading his classmates in the completion of their task. At one point in the activity, he noted that the phrase "eating out of my hand" could be aptly expressed, "falling down at my feet." He explained that this paraphrase worked well because it involved substituting "one catch phrase for another with the same meaning."

When the groups presented their passages to the entire class, Tree questioned some of the wordings selected to represent various phrases. For example, when one group called a "land use converter" a "real estate developer," Tree wondered if these two terms were, in fact, synonymous, or if a "land use converter" might also be an "architect" or even a "builder." Tree's fellow students, teacher, and I were entertained by this semantic puzzle.

I've worked with Tree's reading teacher for many years, so she followed my progress in this inquiry throughout the term in which she taught Tree. She commented to me on several occasions that when Tree was actually present in her class, she saw clear evidence of his ability to synthesize the material she introduced and use it productively in a variety of contexts. Tree provided me with a concrete example of her observations one day when he was writing a short paper on strategies he had learned during the term. In reference to the note-taking techniques of outlining or mapping and summarizing an article or textbook chapter, Tree commented, "Outlining and summarizing go together like milk and cookies." While I had never thought of it that way before, I saw his point, as, I assume, did his instructor. In any case, Tree earned a passing grade in this class, thereby completing his "developmental" reading coursework.

About Tree's math class, I know very little. He fulfilled the four credit course's requirements well enough to earn a B for his efforts. When I asked Tree about his progress in that class, he explained that he felt confident in math because he had taken math throughout his four years in high school and done reasonably well.

Although Tree tried to be punctual for his English 001 class, which met three times each week at 8 a.m., he was unsuccessful. He eventually obtained permission from his professor to attend her 9:30 section of the same course. However, by the time he managed this, Tree had fallen behind in his efforts to acquire the skills necessary to pass a departmentally administered exit exam, a test quite similar to one he had passed to exit his English 091 class the previous semester. Grammatical issues involving sentence structure and syntax detracted from Tree's otherwise engaging prose style.

When he called me to tell me his "bad news" about this course, he explained ruefully that his professor assured him that even though she hadn't graded his exit essay herself, she "would have gone to bat" for him if his attendance and performance had been more consistent throughout the semester. Tree remarked repeatedly that he had disappointed both him and me with his failing performance in the English class. He explained that he was frustrated by the academic issues that provoked his failure. He referred to his need to overcome his problems with procrastination and attendance. He elaborated on these issues, calling them a "syndrome" that he'd been exhibiting for so long, it had become almost instinctive. Furthermore, he asked me if his poor performance in this class meant that I would "drop" him from my study. He seemed sincerely relieved when I assured him that I would not. I did use this opportunity, however, to admonish Tree to plan his time a bit more diligently in the future.

He fared better in the African American history course he took during the summer of 1998. Even though he worked both on and off campus at that time, he managed a C+ in that course with a B+ on a paper he wrote comparing the views and contributions of Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan.

As I write this, Tree is more than halfway through his fourth semester at the college. During his third semester, he drafted a paper for his American history class on the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. I find it noteworthy to consider Tree's progress in examining issues through writing. During his initial semester at college, he wrote about steroid use among football players. A year later, he discussed the politics of governmental strategies in an era he knows only through reading and conversation in and out of class. It seems that as he becomes more comfortable with college coursework, he is rising to increasingly rigorous academic challenges.

Tree and I still meet regularly to talk or work on assignments. Our time spent working together has allowed me, not only the opportunity to repay him for the countless hours he has shared with me in this inquiry, but also to observe the processes he uses to complete his tasks. While he is sometimes confused about how to take an assignment from the direction sheet to completion, he is making progress in this area. Initially, he would compound his problems by waiting until the last minute (or even after) to address a project. Over the course of this investigation, I've noticed Tree becoming more punctual. Recently, he has been anxious to complete papers early enough to allow his instructors to respond and afford him the opportunity to rewrite. He earned the first A- of his college career when he rewrote his paper on the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki according

to the suggestions provided by the instructor of his American history class. When he called to tell me, his elation was matched by mine.

We continue to spend a great deal of time together perhaps, in part, because of a crisis Tree confronted in his life on campus during the Fall 1998 semester: his decision to leave the football team. I was actually quite startled by this turn of events. I had attended parts of several of his summer practices and his first game. I thought he was doing well in his position as an offensive tackle. He played for a good deal of the game I attended, and he evidenced strong camaraderie with his teammates when he was on the sidelines. I was surprised when he came to see me specifically to talk about leaving the team. He explained that the game just wasn't "calling" him anymore, and he simply didn't want to play because the "fun" had gone out of an activity he did specifically for that purpose.

As he did when he had performed poorly in his English class, he expressed concern that I might "drop" him from my study if he left the team and seemed reassured when I told him otherwise. After deliberating for a few days, he told Coach Peters of his decision. This must have been difficult for him because he had often spoken of his respect and admiration for the coach during our weekly conversations.

One particularly touching reference Tree made to Coach Peters occurred when he was describing the problems rampant in his neighborhood. He stated that what that area needed was Coach Peters. He presented an imaginary scenario involving Coach Peters spotting kids loitering on a street corner. He explained that Coach Peters would "intimidate" them into going to school. He even imitated the coach's words, "'Son, what you standing on the corner for, son? You're supposed to be in school, son.' You know

how he does it. They'd straighten up, 'I'm going to school tomorrow, you know.'"

According to Tree, no one else could ever accomplish this.

When I asked Tree about his conversation with the coach on the day of his resignation, he explained that he told the coach he'd stopped having "fun." The coach, true to the image Tree had created of him in my mind, replied, "This isn't a game, son. It's a business." The coach's stance is understandable considering that the college's team is rated among the top ten junior college squads in the country. It is also revealing in terms of Tree's decision to leave the team.

We've spoken about Tree's resignation in hindsight, and he still seems to have no regrets. He said that while he had really enjoyed the game in high school, his two years on that school's varsity squad represented his entire career. He knew he had the size for the sport at the Division I college level, but he did not see his skills or desire as comparably developed. He continues to hold the team's head coach in the highest regard and has maintained his friendship with several of his teammates. Often, when he stops by to visit me in my office, he is accompanied by one or another of them. Tree has also been supportive of several other players who have resigned from the team for various reasons.

When I think about Tree's visibility on campus in terms of the image that seemed to define him, it strikes me that his leaving the team was a "gutsy" decision. He "looks" like a football player; it's easy to "spot" him on or off an athletic field. Administrators, faculty, and students assume that he is a member of the team. It must have been very difficult to relinquish this aspect of his public persona when he gave up his membership on the highly-competitive and prestigious squad. Yet he says that he's enjoying school

more now than before because he's able to "concentrate" on his classes and focus on his academic life.

Tree's Employment

On campus.

One consequence of Tree's withdrawal from the college's football program was the loss of his job in the college's physical education complex. He had been working for about six months as a guide and monitor in the basement of the gym. The job, similar to that held by several of the college's athletes, gave him the opportunity to earn some money while accommodating the time commitment involved in playing a sport.

He used the time he spent sitting at an information desk to do homework or study. Tree was proud and appreciative of his earnings. One day we were talking when another student-worker walked by. He asked Tree if he had cashed his paycheck. Tree held up a wad of money and boasted, "This is going straight to my mom to help her pay some bills." While Tree's tuition is funded through state and federal grants, he and his mom struggle to provide for his books and daily expenses.

Although Tree knew that he would be relinquishing his job along with his team membership, he was willing to accept this consequence of his decision. He explained to me that he and his mom had discussed it and she supported his resignation, as long as he "stayed in school." His employment issues eventually resolved themselves when the director of our department's Learning Center offered him a job as a student aide. She had come to know Tree through his involvement in this inquiry and felt he would be an asset to the students who sought assistance with the computers in the center.

Working for "Doc."

Perhaps one reason Tree was willing to give up his job in the college's physical education complex is his ongoing position working for his uncle, Bishop Allen. Bishop Allen, a Baptist minister Tree affectionately calls, "Doc," out of respect for his degree in divinity studies, owns a refrigeration and air conditioning business. Since he was a young boy, Tree has accompanied his "uncle" on installation, maintenance, and repair calls throughout the metropolitan area. He works whenever he can during the school year and for as many hours as he is needed over the summer.

Tree explained his position, "I started working for Doc when I was thirteen years old... just to help him [carry] the air conditioner kind of thing. But I started to become eager to learn the trade, so he started to teach me in the years to follow. It's been going on ever since." He elaborated on the nature of his work:

It's a thinking process. Like say, for instance, the installation of a compressor. You got to find out what size compressor fits whatever size air conditioner, refrigerator, and what you do is write down the model number and take it to the store..... You get it and take it back and take the old one out and put the new one in and see how it [the cooling unit] functions with the new compressor. If it's good, you just wrap it up and get paid.... [If not,] you got to find out if it needs an overload or what it's missing.

I asked Tree how he learned all this; he credited his uncle as an expert who taught courses in refrigeration at a technical college. He continued by noting that his uncle was considering retirement but wanted to wait until Tree finished school and could take over the business. This notion pleases Tree who already knows what he will call the business:

"Allen and Prince Refrigeration." He said he would keep Doc's name in his company's title. "I wouldn't change his name because he established it. That's why I'll call it 'Allen and Prince.'"

From time to time during the course of this inquiry, Tree and I have conversed about various aspects of his work with his uncle. He is filled with anecdotes, both of technical problems that he solved, and incidents involving dealing with customers or suppliers. He told me about a time when his uncle became irate over a misunderstanding about a fee. Tree explained that rather than cause a scene, he left the apartment where they were working and called his uncle to follow him. He said that it was not worth jeopardizing their reputation through an argument over a service charge. After his uncle calmed down, he thanked Tree for defusing the heat of the moment.

Still More About Tree

Tree is aware that he has the ability to think before he reacts to situations, not only on his job, but in his personal life as well. However, he's alternately pleased and disappointed in himself for his tendency to "be laid back." He cited a very specific example to illustrate this:

If my sister Betty and I go into a restaurant and order something... if it isn't exactly the way [Betty] wants it, you've got to take it back, and if you don't take it back, she'll leave.... I figure maybe the waiter has a problem or is having a bad day. I figure just let me get my stuff and get out of here, but Betty keeps... whatever.

While Tree acknowledges that in such a case, this quality is a strength, he feels it works against him in potential romantic relationships.

I'm too nice. Like Kelly, over in [a neighboring community], me and her were supposed to go out twice.... So I'm getting ready for this Friday.... I'm going to get a new shirt.... I'm saving up my dough.... So I call her on Thursday night.... So about an hour went past, and we're just talking about nothing, so I brought it up when I'm about to hang up, so she said, "No, I'm going to the museum tomorrow."

He concluded this story with sarcastic rhetoric, "So is the museum open all night? Right." Tree was quite disappointed, not only in having his date canceled twice, but in his inability to react assertively to Kelly's slight. Recently Tree has been making the acquaintance of a few young women at the college. He often rushes into my office to say hello and then dashes off, explaining as he exits that he has a lunch date with this or that young woman. He actually seems to have expanded his social horizons a bit since leaving the football team. He's made new friends and even found new traveling companions.

The ready wit and affable good-nature that Tree used to socialize in high school is once again serving him well and enabling him to grow more and more comfortable with college life. He speaks appreciatively of "brainiacs" in his classes who "ask mad questions" about the content of his coursework. On the other hand, he sees his college credits accumulating and has expressed his confidence in his ability to navigate his way through school. He seems pleased with the intellectual aspects of his college courses. He speaks of issues that are raised in his classes including such notions as the possibility of true equality within a democratic society, lifestyle variations among cultural groups, and the validity of various explanations of political situations. He asks questions, debates

ideas, and researches information, not merely to fulfill course requirements, but to satisfy his curiosity about the possibilities afforded by diverse thoughts and knowledge.

At the same time, Tree remains focused on his practical goals. He speaks of graduation and what he'll do afterward. He sees schooling as a means of securing his own and his family's financial and social prosperity. He says he wants what I have: a home that's a "miracle" and a "comfortable" life. As he sees it now, a college degree is essential to this pursuit.

The Larger Picture

When I consider the story Tree and I have told, I am struck by the contrasts between the person I see and the student he is alleged to be on the basis of his academic records and standardized test scores. As a member of the population labeled "underprepared," "basic," "remedial," or "developmental," he is often considered in terms of his "deficiencies" and these "deficiencies" are considered reason to deny him access to the academy, as well as to deprive the academy of his presence.

As mentioned earlier, Traub (1994) describes developmental students at City College of New York as "barely socialized to school" (p. 109) and "arriving at college so deeply disadvantaged, psychologically as well as academically, that City was virtually unable to help them" (p. 209). Needham (1994) writes that developmental students are "usually unmotivated," and that "they are truly the 'loose canons' in the classroom" (p. 21). She describes the backgrounds of these students as an "intellectual wasteland" (p. 22). Clearly something is at odds here, for it is impossible for me to see the reflective, inquisitive, and capable Marcus Prince, "Tree," in any of these depictions.

Are Traub (1994) and Needham (1994) wrong? Are they biased? Or is Tree an exception to the rule? Could another researcher, looking only at Tree's problems with procrastination and absenteeism, draw a picture of him compatible with Traub and Needham's view of "underprepared" college students? Most certainly. Yet when I examine Tree's richly experienced life, and the strengths and capabilities he has nurtured through it, I am compelled to paint a much broader portrait. When I consider who he is and what he has to offer, I find convincing evidence to counter those who find his presence in college troubling.

Tree is a compelling human being who wants to learn. His view of higher education is refreshingly idealistic, rather than jaded and mercenary. He understands, without apparent resentment or self-justifying excuses, that he is expected to meet the college's standards in terms of attendance and task completion, and he is working toward accomplishing this. He seems to see the college's expectations of him as reasonable and attainable. He knows he must comply with certain requirements to pursue his goals. Marcus Prince is, perhaps unexpectedly, but undoubtedly in many ways, an ideal college student.

Along with his academic issues, he brings evidence of numerous capabilities with him to college. First of all, Tree is a survivor. His very presence at the college supports this claim. Growing up in a community where crime and violence are a way of life, Tree has witnessed the destruction of many friends. Few of the men who entered junior high school with him are still functioning in society.

The figures reported by the Board of Education of the City of New York for the Class of 1997, Tree's class, indicate that only 43.3% of the enrolled males graduated (p.

11). The board further notes that only 18.4% of the class of 1997, male and female, earned a NY. Regents' endorsed diploma (p. 9). The remainder, including Tree, hold local diplomas, indicating the fulfillment of requirements much less rigorous than those necessary for a Regents' diploma.

Furthermore, according to Schwartz (1995), the problems relating to violence, crime, and poverty, which Tree sees as influencing the high school graduation rate in his neighborhood's schools, are common in urban areas. Schwartz holds that, in these areas, the high school dropout rate is likely to be double the national average, and incarceration, disciplinary measures, personal concerns including unplanned parenthood or substance abuse, or severe family problems largely account for this attrition.

R. Wilson (1986) and W. Wilson (1987) also discuss the shocking severity of academically deficient inner-city education in the United States. Wilson (1986), for example, claims that in Chicago's nonselective, racially segregated high schools, "only 2,000 of the original class of 25,000 students both completed high school and could read at or above the level considered average in the rest of the country" (p. 58). While this number does not include those who moved to other areas where they may have earned a diploma, it indicates an enormous problem in American urban schools, like the one from which Tree graduated.

Tree has managed to overcome the obstacles of his surroundings through his own resources and those of his family. Although Tree's family attempts to nurture him while protecting him from his neighborhood, he has learned from them and from the various environments through which he has experienced life how to negotiate the different communities in which he lives, works, and studies. When Erwin (1990) says that the

"developmental" college reader and writer has academic deficiencies compounded by "debilitating... less than average world knowledge, at a time when average is already defined to be a state of relative ignorance...." (p. 264), I must assume he has never met Marcus Prince. This young man has offered much evidence to indicate that he knows the often-conflicting intricacies of his various worlds.

In many ways, Tree has more than survived; he has thrived. He's been able to use his disposition, integrity, wit, reason, and stature to meet the commitments he has made to his family, friends, and himself. While he appreciates the pride his family members take in him, Tree expects no kudos for his loyalty to those he loves. It's natural for him; it's, quite simply, a part of who he is. At no time in the course of our investigation did I come across any evidence to counter this claim. Whether it is in sheltering his sisters from volatile relationships, accommodating the entry of his step-dad into his family's daily life, or modeling for his nephews the transition from adolescence into adulthood, Tree's actions as a family member are productive. He is eminently successful in his roles as brother, uncle, and son.

In his daily life with his family, as well as in his community, Tree exhibits mastery of what Abbott (1995, 1997) considers "new competencies," including any of the "range of higher-order skills" such as "the ability to synthesize, to solve problems, to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty, and, especially, to be creative and personally enterprising" (1995, p. 8). Abbott also believes that while these competencies are essential for productivity in society, they are not the stuff of school-based learning, which has traditionally emphasized "old competencies," such as "numeracy and literacy" (1995, p. 8). According to the standards used to evaluate such "old" competencies, Tree may be

seen as academically underprepared for college. Yet, Tree's mastery of the competencies essential for life, learned through the "experiences of an active life, and requir[ing] a far broader base than a classroom," make him the ideal participant in the college community. He has much to offer all of us because he has already learned much of what the academy's members need to know in order to negotiate life in society at large.

That Tree's presence enriches the academy is evident from the testimony of its members. His friends, Benny and Ceez, as well as other students I've spoken with about Tree, make references to his sense of humor, quick wit, and reasonable, responsible demeanor. The football coach used what seems to me like "coach-speak" to describe him. "He's a good kid," he said when I first asked him about Tree. "He's got brains, you know," he added in a later conversation about Tree's performance in the classroom. These comments are as revealing as they are succinct.

For the most part, Tree has a reasonable appreciation of his ability to participate in his family's life and to manage his neighborhood. He knows he can think on his feet as well as consider possibilities before he reacts to circumstances. Even though he sometimes finds his tendency to "under-react" irksome because he feels it implies "weakness," I see it as evidence of his sensitivity to toward those around him. He understands, for example, that an offhand comment can result in violence in his local community. While he avoids his neighborhood because of this, he handles potentially volatile situations discreetly to avoid confrontations. This strikes me as particularly meaningful when I consider Tree's stature. He clearly stands to win more fights than he might lose, so I respect his easygoing demeanor all the more.

This sensitivity is evident, not only in his behavior toward his family and his neighbors in his home community, but also in the way he has learned to negotiate his life at the college. In fact, this sensitivity is, in my view, largely responsible for his ability to move gracefully between and among the various contexts of his life. Gordon, Bowman and McCallister (in progress) maintain that the importance of the ability to weave contexts together meaningfully is essential for the negotiation of life in the pluralistic society of contemporary America. They claim further that "educated people in modern times can look at situations and understand them from multiple perspectives" (p. 7). The academy needs Tree and others like him to model their capabilities so that all of us can learn from them.

While Tree entered college typical of the population who Shaughnessy (1977) describes as "strangers in academia, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life, unprepared for the sorts of tasks their teachers were about to assign them" (p. 3), time spent in college has helped Tree acclimate himself to campus life. He is becoming increasingly aware that he has the ability to engage himself and others in learning situations which present themselves in school, and he is beginning to acknowledge the creative, evaluative, and practical strengths he brings with him to college (Stérnberg, 1997). He explains, for example, that he can get his fellow students to "eat out of [his] hand" when he argues a point about which he feels strongly. In his attempts to address his academic issues, he uses his capabilities to facilitate his classroom and campus-wide experiences at the college. In doing so, he teaches the college community what he knows and models for us competencies critical to success in today's society (Abbott, 1995).

On the other hand, Tree is still wary of his place among those students who "know so much" about a subject discussed in a class. While I am attempting to nurture Tree's self-confidence in this area, his hesitancy actually reveals his understanding of the politics of academic life. When he read a draft of this portrait, he commented, "Chris, when I talk, I sound uneducated, don't you think?" This is an issue that, according to London (1992), is often uncomfortable for first-generation college students. Tree realizes that "a kind of talk... identifies who is inside and who is outside of academic culture" (Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 68). Hopefully, as Tree grows increasingly confident of the capabilities, including the engaging "voice," that he brings to school with him, he will become comfortable with his membership in "the academic club" (Rose, 1989, p. 141) that is college.

Despite any lingering uneasiness, Tree is using his personal resources to participate fully in the college community. Not only has he grown more adept at negotiating the college's coursework and politics, he has made many acquaintances, several friends, and earned the respect of faculty and students. He has built a bridge between his culture and that of the college (Soliday, 1996), and he is crossing that bridge more and more readily. Marcus Prince is becoming, on a daily basis, a stronger, more confident member of the academy, and the academy is growing stronger for his presence. We must encourage and facilitate his stay among us, not just for his sake, but for the academy's as well.

CHAPTER 3

"What if... what of it?"

A Portrait of McKenna Green

Entree

One of the challenges of college teaching occurs in the form of the 8 a.m. class. Despite the hour, students and instructor must be awake, alert, and ready to conduct the business of the day. There is no time to play "catch-up" because the class meets at the same hour each session of the semester. While I'm definitely a morning person, my students most often are not, nor are they anxious to overcome the impediments of inclement weather, traffic jams, parking lot closures, and late nights, among others. I've found over the years that the students in my early morning class are either the worst or the best I will meet in the course of a term. If they're the worst, they will soon be gone, overwhelmed by my rather inflexible demand that they be in class on time all the time. Those who remain, however, are among the most enthusiastic and conscientious students I work with during any given semester.

McKenna Green was one of those students present in that early morning class on the first day of the Fall 1997 term. The notes I took that day record that she was there when I arrived. She appeared to be the quintessential "new student," with her shining hair, fresh, yet carefully casual clothes, and inquisitive hazel eyes. My notes also remind me that she was one of the "chatty" women who sat in the rear of the room, conversing with the woman next to her for the better part of our initial class meeting. I see too that she listened curiously, if a bit anxiously, to my presentation about my plan for our course and asked several questions about Reading Workshop requirements and procedures

including, "What if I don't choose from the [books on the library] cart? Do I need approval?" Although I didn't realize it at the time, this question foreshadowed many of McKenna's concerns, not only in terms of our course, but also in terms of her academic life and life in general.

McKenna's queries and comments are mentioned frequently in the notes I made throughout the term. "I tried to write a literary letter," she said when we began that aspect of our course, "but I don't know how to get started." Remarks like this often provided the germ of the mini-lesson for a class session, so I recorded them faithfully along with the impromptu book reviews that McKenna readily offered. She was, in fact, the first of my Reading Workshop students to complete a book through our course. Although she didn't recommend the book she read, she was very proud to be able to tell us why she felt we wouldn't like it. McKenna also explained that she'd finished the book so quickly because she'd read for most of the previous Sunday, having had "nothing" else to do.

This enthusiastic, if brusque, approach to a course that seemed to worry McKenna at first facilitated her progress throughout the semester. McKenna was a wonderful Reading Workshop student. She read several of the books in our class library. She also bought books outside of class, read them, conversed and corresponded with us about them, and then shared them with anyone who wanted to read them as well. After her first couple of selections, she chose Sleepers by Lorenzo Carcaterra, a book which was popular as a film at the time. Although she expressed great reluctance to delve into this rather lengthy text, she decided to give it a try. We were all surprised at how quickly she read the story of injustice and revenge, and we were all engaged in the discussions prompted by her remarks about the book.

She became an advisor for the other students in our class, several of whom read books after she had talked about them. When one student was confused about the plot of a mystery, he would question her daily about his reading. She would help him clarify his understanding of his book in a nonchalant, low-key manner that invited him to keep questioning her as he read.

My notes also indicate that McKenna seemed to enjoy the process of selecting books. She regularly helped other students choose books, studying the covers, reading the reviews printed on the backs, and scanning the books for length and readability. At one point, I brought in a copy of The New York Times' "Best Sellers" list. McKenna perused it; then she acquired and read Girlfriends by Renee Berry and Tamara Traeder because its synopsis seemed appealing. She explained how she had located the book in the section marked "Best Sellers" at a local bookstore and had shared it with her mom when she was done reading it. The other students and I appreciated the opportunities McKenna afforded us to consider the wide variety of fiction and non-fiction books she introduced throughout the semester.

I was grateful for McKenna's presence in our class even as I grew more and more curious about her. On the one hand, she was clearly our group's most enthusiastic participant. She actually brought in dozens of books she and her family had accumulated over the years and donated them to our library. On the other hand, after she became comfortable with the members of the class including me, she spoke vehemently about "hating" school and getting "kicked out" of the parochial high school she had attended through the eleventh grade. McKenna seemed to be a young woman of contrasts. Since she frequently inquired about the progress of my budding study, I found myself hoping

she would agree to participate on an individual basis when our semester in class together ended.

Coincidentally, or perhaps in keeping with the stance she had assumed throughout the term, McKenna was virtually the first student to schedule our end-of-the-semester conference. The diligence with which she had addressed the tasks involved in this course had proven fruitful. McKenna's class average was an A, and her score on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized exit assessment placed her into Reading 002, the last course in the college's developmental sequence. McKenna and I were happy about this accomplishment since it accelerated her move into credit-bearing coursework.

As we concluded our discussion of McKenna's progress and the course itself, we talked a bit about her opposing attitudes toward high school and college. I asked her if she would like to participate in an investigation that would delve into this, as well as the other aspects of her life in and out of school. She agreed, explaining that she had been willing to participate from the beginning. As I did with each of my student-collaborators, I insisted that McKenna talk her decision over with her family and get back to me. I was elated when she reaffirmed her willingness and even more anxious to proceed when she told me her mother's response to my proposed investigation. McKenna said that her mom was concerned that I'd write "negative" things about McKenna because teachers always had negative comments to make about her. I assured her that I would place my emphasis on her strengths and capabilities, on what she had to offer us in college, even as she and I acknowledged her vulnerabilities. This is in keeping with my efforts to model my study on Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' (1997) theories of portraiture as a mode of qualitative inquiry. My intent was to focus on McKenna's health and resilience as a person and a

student rather than on the "pathology and disease" that is the target of many social science investigations (p. 8).

McKenna and Me

McKenna and I met for the first time on a cold January day during which I was assigned to registration at the college. I was anxious about our meeting because this was the first I'd scheduled with my brand new student-collaborators. We met in my office, and the notes I recorded from that conversation indicate that "we just talked."

The conversation proved valuable in establishing rapport between us. We learned that we had both been students of one of the same teachers in high school, a social studies teacher at the beginning of his career in my youth who had retired after McKenna's sophomore year. We actually had much in common in terms of high school since McKenna's school was created when the Catholic parish school I attended was taken over and moved to a larger facility by the diocese.

Also, we reside in neighboring towns, and McKenna's social life centers on several of the people and pubs in my community. Consequently, we know many of the same families. We shared much local gossip during our first meeting and in the process got to know each other a bit better. McKenna's responded to my "ice-breaking" question: "So what was it like growing up?" by stating quite simply that she was "always getting into trouble." While her conversations in class had alluded to difficulty in dealing with school, the suggestion of this was such a contrast to her performance in my class that I looked forward to learning more.

McKenna's Family Background

In order to try to understand who McKenna was and is, as well as determine how such an outstanding student would claim her performance in our class atypical of her school experience, I spoke at length, not only with McKenna, but with several people in McKenna's life. Her mother, her sister, Cara, and her cousin, Roy, a young man McKenna's age who had been her "best friend" growing up, shared many stories with me. I have also met at least once a week for the spring semester and regularly over the summer and throughout the 1998-99 school year with McKenna. On several occasions I've met with McKenna and Destiny Jordan, another student in that 8:a.m. class who had become friends with McKenna and who is another of my student-collaborators.

From these discussions, I learned that McKenna Green was born on July 4, 1979, the third of four children. Her dad, a hard-working man, who originally prospered through the delicatessen business, currently owns and operates a residential construction company. Her mother, an equally hard-working woman, stays at home to care for her family. McKenna has an older brother, Ron, and an older sister, Cara, both of whom are out of school and working. McKenna's younger sister, Kelly, is a high school student.

McKenna, her mother, Cara, and Roy all attest to McKenna's strong will and dominant role within the family while she was growing up. Her mom told a story to illustrate McKenna's will and the wit with which she executed it. Ms. Green explained that when McKenna was five, mother and daughter were in the wedding party of McKenna's uncle. Ms. Green was the matron of honor, and McKenna was the flower girl. Both were required to wear elaborate purple gowns, and McKenna's duty was to

walk down the church aisle, strewing rose petals in the path of the wedding party. Ms. Green fussed over McKenna's hair and gown and then dressed for the wedding herself.

When she returned to the room where McKenna was waiting, Ms. Green found McKenna in her underwear and the lovely purple gown "crumpled in a ball on the chair." McKenna was insisting, "I'm not wearing that ugly dress. I'm not wearing that dress."

Ms. Green continued, "So I had to get her ready and get over to the bride's house for the pictures. I put the dress on her again, and I got ready again. I came back, and the dress was off again. She must have taken it off six or seven times." Finally, Ms. Green carted McKenna, kicking and screaming, to the bride's house. As soon as they entered it, "she was like a different person.... For the pictures she was smiling. At the church, she walked up the aisle and threw her flowers. She was so nice the rest of the day."

Ms. Green concluded this story by stating that this strong will was evident in McKenna's behavior throughout her childhood. "There was no changing her mind."

McKenna's mom also noted that despite her determined will, McKenna was very close to her family members growing up. McKenna confirmed her mother's view by speaking of her family ties often and at length. She mentioned so many different aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives that I became quite confused about the relationships between and among McKenna's loved ones. She eventually constructed a family tree on a piece of paper to illustrate who her family members are and how they are related. From this drawing, I could see that McKenna's family weaves through three closely-tied generations and across her mother and father's extended clans. She spoke fondly of big Sunday afternoon dinners at her grandma's house, meals involving delicious food and animated discussion of family matters, politics, sports, and local gossip. She also

discussed problems faced by various family members, as well as her parents and her own efforts to deal with the issues confronting one or another relative.

McKenna has spoken frequently about her relationship with her cousin, Roy, the son of her father's brother. The two cousins are the same age and spent a great deal of time together when they were younger. They must be quite the match because when the three of us got together, they told me stories of mischief they made and jokes they played on various family members. McKenna observed, "We just did everything together, and everything we did we always got in trouble for together." Roy also mentioned the big Sunday dinners McKenna remembered fondly; he explained that twenty or so relatives would gather at their grandmother's home for good food and conversation. Even today, the cousins are fast friends, talking, socializing, and studying with each other.

They have been together quite often this last year because of a tragedy in their family. Roy's mother was involved in a catastrophic car accident. She was comatose for months and has been left paralyzed from the waist down, as well as with irreparable damage to her brain. As I write this, she is in a rehabilitation facility, awaiting placement in a nursing home. Since Roy, his older sister, Anna, and younger brother, Alan, are, for the most part, caring for themselves, McKenna and her family have been providing them with as much support as they can.

McKenna is particularly concerned about Alan who, at fourteen years old, has been traumatized by his mother's accident. She worries about how much time he spends alone and about his chronic problem with truancy. Even before this tragedy occurred, Alan's school performance was problematic, mostly due to his extensive absenteeism.

McKenna expressed the responsibility she feels for supporting Alan: "I'm trying to stay as strong as I can and... trying to help."

She explained that on the night of the accident, she stayed with Alan at the hospital, asking, "Alan, how do you feel?" When he replied that he was scared, she said, "Alan, let it out." Alan's response was to run away from the hospital. McKenna said, "So I chased him around.... He was running away from the bushes. He was running onto the parkway. I said, 'No, don't go that way. Go that way if you're going to run.'" McKenna stressed that she had to let Alan "run" from his problems that night, so she could let him see that she would follow him.

Even though I am writing this almost a year after the tragedy, McKenna remains a constant in Alan's life, calling him and seeing him almost daily. It is obvious from her remarks that she worries about him,

It's usually just him sleeping all by himself. Roy goes out, and he won't come home. Then [Alan] says to me, "You know, I slept home alone;" [I say], "Alan, you know you can call me any time you want. If you feel lonely, call me and I'll come pick you up. You can sleep at my house."

She regularly inquires about his school attendance and has learned that he has been facing greater problems with truancy than ever before. McKenna shook her head in sadness and frustration when she told me about this, observing that her parents, siblings, and she have been trying everything they can think of to help Alan, and they will continue to support him as he tries to face his issues. McKenna is also determined to encourage Alan's siblings, Roy and Anna, as they deal with the crises in their lives.

Perhaps one reason McKenna is willing and able to assume responsibility for her cousins' concerns is the strength she gains from the love and support of her parents.

McKenna and her dad and mom are extremely close. She explained to me at one of our initial meetings that she is glad she stayed home for college even though several of her friends board at their schools. She said laughingly that her older brother and sister still live at home, so she feels no pressure to leave. "I can never go away to school. I'm so close to my family--my whole family...."

"Seriously, my father, he's the best father.... My dad's so easy going," McKenna commented. "My dad is happy all the time. You know, my dad gets in bad moods [sometimes]. If he gets an [expensive] phone bill, we have to hear it from him. But most of the time, my dad is happy." She sees him as "laid back" in terms of his sense of discipline with his children but intense in his involvement with them and with his large and sometimes problematic extended family. She illustrated this by offering numerous examples of his concern and generosity, not only in terms of his immediate family, but also in his dealings with his brothers, sister, and their children. McKenna told me that her dad offers psychological, emotional, and financial support to his extended family on such a generous scale that she worries he'll become exhausted by his efforts.

Throughout the course of this inquiry, McKenna has spoken at virtually every meeting of her mother's concern for her well-being as well as of her mother's support in all aspects of her life. "I'm attached to my mother," she said. She also noted that her brother and sisters feel this way too. Cara, for example, insists that she's going to live at home even after she marries. McKenna observed lightheartedly that her sister is not really serious about this; however, they are all sincere in their affection for their mother.

She commented further, "I want to get my own apartment. But, I don't want to move far. I'm close to my family."

McKenna appreciates the care her mother provides for her and her siblings. She said,

My mom's a worry wart. She does not go to sleep until every child is home in the house. When I got sick [with a stomach virus and she was away], she wanted to come home. She said, "You want me to come home?" I was, "Mom, get out of here." She said, "I feel so bad I'm away." [My mom] will sit all three of us [McKenna, her older brother and sister] down, and she will preach about drinking and driving. You don't understand. This is every weekend. Every weekend. "If you're going to drive, if you just happen to have a sip of beer, just call me, and I'll come pick up your car."

It is only natural that, at 19 years old, McKenna sometimes feels her mother worries needlessly, yet she is genuinely grateful as well.

McKenna also attributes her presence in college largely to her relationship with her parents. She explained that while her brother and sister attended college, neither graduated. "I want to be the first person in my family to graduate from school" has been a repeated refrain in the conversations McKenna and I shared over the course of this inquiry. Remarks like, "My parents are so proud of me [for persisting in college]" and "I want to make my parents proud" have been woven throughout our investigation, reminding McKenna and me of her resolve in pursuing a college degree.

McKenna's speaks enthusiastically of her relationship with her brother and sisters. She has had many stories to tell me of good times spent with her siblings. The family

vacationed together at various locations when the children were young, and McKenna remembers these trips quite fondly. Cara and McKenna shared reminiscences with me about the family's periodic excursions to Broadway shows. Cara mentioned that when they saw Grease, McKenna was particularly taken with Dominique Dawes, an Olympic gymnast, who was in the cast. After the show, McKenna led the family to the stage door and insisted they wait for Ms. Dawes to appear. When the gymnast emerged from the theater, there was McKenna, playbills in hand. She secured an autograph for every member of the family while they looked on in delight. They traveled home that night with souvenirs to accompany their memories.

McKenna's relationship with her brother and sisters extends well beyond enjoyment of good times to deep affection and, when necessary, intervention on her part to ensure their well-being. Cara observed, "McKenna has the biggest heart in the whole world. She's constantly giving and giving everyone the benefit of the doubt. She tries to keep a strong exterior, but she's a big softie."

At one point during our investigation, McKenna's brother's car was stolen. The situation was made all the worse because a great deal of softball equipment and his wallet containing several hundred dollars were in the car at the time. McKenna explained that she shared her car with Ron throughout the ordeal. She said,

I felt bad for him.... Like his whole life was in that car.... What bothered him more is all his friends' stuff was in the car. I mean it's not his fault, but he feels that it's his responsibility.... Everyone offered him money.... He won't take it. The reason why he had so much money in the car was his girlfriend graduated college

on Friday. He was throwing her a surprise party, so he was going shopping.... I was, like, if I had the money, I would give it to him in a second.

McKenna's concern for her brother's misfortune was heartfelt. She demonstrated it by talking with him and keeping him company when he was feeling down about his problems. At the same time, when he "just stayed in his room," she respected his need for privacy while letting him know she was sympathetic.

Another time during the course of our investigation, McKenna's younger sister, Kelly, became involved in a verbal altercation with a girl from a neighboring community. McKenna intervened on her sister's behalf, quickly calming the agitated parties and removing her sister from the situation. When Cara, McKenna's older sister, had surgery on her knee, McKenna drove her around until she felt confident driving and then rode with her to be sure she could manage the car.

Anecdotes like these fill the pages of the transcripts of the conversations McKenna and I have had during our eighteen month investigation. I think an apt summary of her views about her family can be found in her response to a question I asked her one day: "What's the most important thing in your life?" She replied,

Probably my family. I'm not gonna say just one person; I would say my whole family. Why? I don't know; they are just there, you know.... They're the best family. We have fun every night. We laugh every night. It's weird; we all get along. My parents are awesome.

McKenna and School

Elementary school.

Despite the support McKenna receives from her family, she and her mother told me that she struggled from her earliest days as a parochial elementary school student through her years in high school. McKenna attended the same local parish school as her brother and sisters. Her family has always been quite attached to it. Even though her youngest sister has long since graduated, her mom continues to volunteer her time as an aide at the school. Yet McKenna's elementary school years were problematic. "When I went to school, I was always getting in trouble. I couldn't stay still.... From fourth grade, I hated school-- hated! If I could've dropped out, I would have dropped out."

She spoke sympathetically of her neighbor, a little boy who goes to kindergarten for a full day each day. "He came home the other day and he was, like, 'Ma, I don't like school no more.' I could definitely talk to him.... I just never could get into school. I never did work.... I mean, sometimes I did it, but as I got older, I didn't do my work." McKenna repeated these words often, explaining that her attitude toward school worried her parents who spent countless hours helping her with her homework and reports. From time to time, her mother even employed a tutor to work with McKenna. Ms. Green hoped that the intervention of a neutral party might be more helpful than her own efforts in encouraging McKenna's academic progress.

High school.

By the time McKenna reached high school, her antipathy toward school caused her to resist the rules imposed by the faculty and administration of the parochial high school in which she was enrolled. Although Cara had graduated from the same school,

enjoying athletic and academic success, McKenna found herself more and more at odds with her teachers and the deans her classroom behavior often mandated that she see.

In her effort to explain her negative attitude toward high school, McKenna stated, "That's all teachers in high school do: [yell]," and,

See, that's how I was in high school. I didn't want to do anything. I didn't do anything. If teachers were, like, 'Do this,' I sat there, watched the clock, drew, colored, whatever, read magazines. That's why teachers totally gave up on me after a while.

She continued, time and again throughout our investigation, to describe herself in terms I had never witnessed during the semester she was a student in my class. She told me, "every little thing that happened in the school, I got blamed for it automatically." When she was a freshman, for example, "I got threatened by a teacher. I was thrown against a locker, but I didn't say anything." When a girl McKenna had never met was attacked by other students, the dean, "pulled me out of class hard, by my blazer, and dragged me to her office."

McKenna stated further that her mother became upset with her when school authorities called. Ms. Green's older children were, according to McKenna, "great" in school. Of her brother, who attended a prestigious all boys parochial high school, she stated, "He was great. He was very athletic.... All the teachers loved him." Of her sister, Cara, she continued, "She never got in trouble; teachers loved her. They thought she was so funny." In fact, the teacher who pushed McKenna against a locker had also taught Cara. "My sister loved her; she and my sister were friends." So it seems that neither

McKenna's school's officials nor her parents were prepared for her response to the situations that arose during her high school years.

Even though McKenna was popular with the other students, who considered her "funny," she was dismissed from her high school at the end of her junior year. Both McKenna and her mother described the scenario in detail. McKenna and her parents were called to a meeting with the school's principal. He explained that her poor academic performance and classroom demeanor demanded that she leave the high school. However, he was willing to readmit her if she apologized for what he saw as her negative behavior and if she asked for readmittance, not for her parents' sake, but for her own. According to Ms. Green,

[The principal] was saying was that [McKenna] had to go to him and say, "I want to be here because I want to be here. Not because my mother wants me to be here." And she wouldn't do that because that wasn't the case. She didn't want to be there. Not at that point anyway.

Thus, despite her parents' urgings, McKenna refused to capitulate.

Ms. Green summed up her response to McKenna's transfer to public school for senior year,

Well, I was heartbroken, but I said, "If that's what she wants and that's what's going to make her happy, then that's what she has to do." The only thing I told her was, "McKenna, you're going to that school. That's where you want to go. If you get in any trouble, you're in trouble." Because we figured, it's more lax. She just had better watch her step and stay out of trouble. And she did. She got in no trouble. She did fine.

McKenna explained her view of this transfer:

I started all over. No one knew me, no teachers. So they didn't know how I was.

And I [thought], "I've got to prove to my parents," and I changed a lot. I mean if I didn't change, I would've gotten nowhere. I wouldn't have even graduated.

[Before this transfer], I just didn't care. I don't know why; I just didn't care... but now... I care.

She explained that once she went to public school, she got along with her teachers and earned their respect by her polite manners and sincere effort. "My teachers [in public school asked], 'Where do you come from?' And I did all my work; [I was] the only one."

She elaborated on this,

Because you know why? Because at [the parochial high school] you just had to do your work. In [the public school], you didn't have to do it. So, to me, I had to do it. You know, I have to do the opposite. I don't know why.... So I had to work, and I had to show my parents that they made the right decision to let me go there.

McKenna worked hard in her new school as she took the classes she needed to make up due to her previous poor performance. She also studied photography and law, subjects she "got into." She graduated in 1997, after just one year at that high school, having decided to attend college, not only to "make [her] parents proud," but also to study the various aspects of media, her field of interest.

The McKenna I know: The diligent college student.

As mentioned earlier, I met McKenna at virtually her first moment in college. Her outstanding performance in my class juxtaposed with her stories about her earlier attitude and difficulty in school continue to pique my curiosity me more than eighteen

months later as I follow her progress through higher education. When I reread the notes I made that first semester to prepare to write this story, I was reminded once again of the critical role McKenna played in making our course a fruitful experience for us all.

She never missed a class that term, not in reading or the English, math, and freshman seminar classes she took along with it. Her steady presence and commitment to task helped keep me and my other students focused. My notes, for example, indicate that one dreary November day when several of the students were arriving one by one a few minutes after the 8 a.m. class hour, McKenna remarked, "Well, let's get to it. I want to tell you all about how much I read of Rule of the Bone." Her call woke us all up, and we quickly addressed our agenda. McKenna's enthusiastic directive was far more effective than anything I could have said on that uninspired morning. This performance was consistent throughout the term.

When McKenna agreed to collaborate with me on this investigation, I began by speaking with her English instructor from that first fall semester. I did not know this woman, an adjunct professor at the college, but I was anxious to meet her because McKenna spoke animatedly about her and the course itself. This instructor told me that she was pleased with the progress McKenna made in her course and explained that McKenna had been a consistently cooperative and thorough student. McKenna gave me the portfolio of essays she wrote for that class, so I was able to see the growth in her writing myself. She passed both the semi-final and the final essay examinations and moved to the next level of English, a course offered by the English department rather than the Basic Education Program. While this course also carried no credit, passing it would place McKenna into English 101, a three credit composition course.

McKenna also passed her Math 002 course, the highest in a possible sequence of three non-credit courses designed to prepare students for various credit-bearing math courses. Since the college requires students to complete six credits in math for an Associate of Arts degree, McKenna enrolled in a four credit math survey course for the spring term. She also passed the seminar course that is a required component of the Basic Education Program.

McKenna approached her second semester of college feeling responsible for a successful first term. I followed her progress closely during her second semester since we met at least once a week. McKenna asked me for very little help although I offered my services as a tutor at each meeting. She seemed to prefer our conversations to any direct assistance in completing assignments or studying for tests. This was different from the stance taken by Tree, who sought and received my help. While my "teacherly" nature caused me to feel anxious about McKenna's independent negotiation of her coursework, the guidelines we had established for our investigation demanded that I respect her wishes in this regard. Two semesters later, as I write this, I realize that this is what works for the ever-independent, ever-determined McKenna Green.

She took four courses the spring term following her participation in the Basic Education Program: the preparatory English and reading courses and the four credit math course mentioned earlier and a three credit sociology course. McKenna struggled with the math class and withdrew from it. She later completed it successfully when she took it during the college's subsequent summer session.

She spoke frequently and enthusiastically about her English 001 class, which was conducted in the English Department's Writing Center to afford students the opportunity

to write their required essays on the facility's word processors. Her remarks about the class prompted me to get her permission to call her instructor, a senior member of the English department, who authored the grammar text used as part of the course. Professor Devon was surprised by my call. She explained that McKenna had told her that she preferred the format of our reading class, which allowed her to "choose" the reading material and subjects for oral and written discussion, to that of English course, which required her to address specific topics. Professor Devon told me that she had responded by encouraging McKenna to write about issues of her own choosing rather than to follow the specific assignments. Years in the classroom had convinced Professor Devon that it is actually more challenging for students to create and develop their own ideas than to respond to prompts provided by the instructor. McKenna expressed her appreciation of being given this authority for her own work. She ultimately wrote some of her essays based on independent ideas and answered Professor Devon's questions on others. During our phone conversation, Professor Devon invited me to observe McKenna's class, so after securing permission from McKenna, I did.

I arrived a bit late for the class. I was not surprised to find McKenna involved in the classroom discussion about topic sentences and their purpose in expository text. As I remembered from our semester together, she was focused on the matters at hand, and she contributed, not only to the specific point under consideration, but also to the entire classroom dynamic. I could see from her classmates' response to her remarks that McKenna was leading this class in much the same way as she had ours.

At several points throughout the term, McKenna commented about the informal, yet productive, nature of this course and her respect and fondness for her low-key, highly

capable instructor. She passed the course without any problem and enrolled in English 101, a three credit composition course, the following fall term.

Reading 002 is a completely different course from Reading 090, the class which McKenna took with me. This course challenged McKenna; its requirements are rigorous, and it is much more teacher-directed than our reading class. However, McKenna employed the same exemplary student qualities in terms of attendance and assignment completion that had served her so well the previous semester to earn a passing grade. Since this is the last of the required courses in the non-credit reading sequence, McKenna was able to enroll in a communications class instead of a reading course for the subsequent fall term. So a year after enrolling, she began her work in media, the area of study that had brought her to college.

Of all the courses McKenna took during her second semester of college, I was most concerned with her progress in Sociology 203, a three credit, introductory class. McKenna became exasperated almost immediately by this course and its instructor, Professor Newell, whom she found difficult to understand. She mentioned complaining about it to her mother, who responded, according to McKenna, "Oh, great!" McKenna continued, in explanation of her mother's reaction, "I mean I'm definitely not the greatest student, the best student, so having a teacher like that...." To my protests, she replied, "Of course, I want to pass that class.... He said we do not need [optional textbooks], but I bought all three of them anyway." She noted further that frustration with the course and instructor provoked after-class discussions among the students, a few of whom McKenna recognized from her previous semester at college or from the parochial high school she had attended.

As quickly as McKenna became anxious about this course, I joined her mom in worrying about its potential outcome and what damage it might do to the recent feelings of success that had helped to inspire McKenna's perseverance in college. I asked her about it at each of our weekly meetings. Although I offered, she did not seek my help in interpreting the texts or executing the assignments. We just talked about the class. Over time, I saw quite an evolution in McKenna's attitude toward the class. About a month into the semester, for example, she explained that Professor Newell discussed with his students his methods of testing. McKenna said, "He actually asked us what we liked better. He said, 'Oh, when I was in school, I didn't like taking tests.' So he gave us a choice."

Later in the semester, she remarked, "This guy's [Professor Newell] not so bad. I had a conversation with him the other day about the weather. At least he's... talking to me. At least, I'm talking to him a little.... People laugh at him. I mean,... I'll say hello to [him]."

Several weeks after, McKenna spoke about leading the class in a discussion. She was teamed with a classmate for the project, but the other young woman was very reluctant to speak, so McKenna carried the conversation, provoking a heated debate about the problem of homelessness in the United States. She said, "I was setting [my classmates] off. It was so funny. We were laughing. The teacher was actually laughing." Her enfranchisement to this class and her participation in it were deepening.

I secured permission from McKenna and Professor Newell to observe this class and attended a session shortly after the mid-semester. I was able to witness McKenna's concentration on the matters under discussion, the similarities and differences between

sex and gender, and hear her ready contributions to the conversation. I also spoke with the instructor, who was quite deliberate in his efforts to spark students' curiosity about the content of his course including issues relating to class, race, and gender, as well as urban, suburban, and rural life. Ultimately, McKenna prospered in this course, earning a C+ for her efforts. Perhaps even more valuable than her introduction to sociology was her realization that she could manage unfamiliar coursework and establish a positive dynamic in a variety of academic settings.

As I write this, McKenna and I are more than half way through the Spring 1999 semester. We met approximately every third week during the Fall 1998 term, and I spoke with McKenna and her mom several times over the phone. We are still meeting and still talking about school, family, friends, and life in general.

McKenna continues to grow as a student, rising to the challenges presented by increasingly rigorous course requirements. She worked particularly hard during the Fall 1998 semester in her photography course, a class so demanding that other students I know on campus withdrew rather than attempt to fulfill its requirements. She spent long hours in the college's labs and dark rooms. She even returned to campus at night and on weekends to utilize the facilities and perfect her techniques. Her sister, Cara, explained that McKenna's determination to complete a strong final portfolio caused the family to remark on her intensity. McKenna responded, "I need my peace; leave me alone to do this." Cara observed admiringly that McKenna really wanted to do a good job on this project and "when [McKenna] really wants something, she goes after it." Her final portfolio was a series of ten landscape photographs, a subject she chose herself.

McKenna earned a B in her oral communications course, a requirement for her major and a course she loved from the first moment she enrolled in it. She struggled with the human sexuality course she took to fulfill a health requirement. This surprised me because I suggested it to her based on evaluations I had heard from other students. We talked about this afterward, and McKenna explained that the course was taught as a straight lecture, and the grade was determined by three exams. She was uncomfortable with this format and did not thrive in the course. In any case, she will take this class over, perhaps during the next summer session.

Recently, I asked McKenna to appraise her progress in college. She stated, There's been a huge change in me since high school. I don't mind waking up and coming to school because I get to pick my own classes. I find these more interesting than the courses I had to take in high school. I can make my own schedule. I didn't like to have to sit there all day when they [high school officials] told me.

As she did in her first semester at college, McKenna had perfect attendance in all her classes during the fall of 1998. She has remained committed to her pursuit of higher education.

McKenna's Employment

McKenna's progress during the Fall 1998 term was accompanied by her adept management of a job she started at the beginning of the school year. She works each school day in an after-school program sponsored by her local district. From the time McKenna was a student in my class, she had been concerned about getting a job of one kind or another. She said that her parents had been urging her to do so. She mentioned

this at our first interview session: " I need a job. [My parents] say I need a job. I mean, [they say] my little sister has a job and she doesn't even need a job."

Throughout the Spring 1998 semester, McKenna worried about finding work, but she focused her energy on her performance in school rather than on trying to get a job and attend college. She did apply for a job at a local clothing shop, but she did not follow up on her initial application. When spring arrived, she began pursuing a summer job in earnest. Her father encouraged her to do this, and she took his advice to heart. "My dad [said] 'It's not about the money.' So I kind of figured... he doesn't want me sitting home or just going out all day and not having a job." She told me that she appreciated her father's work ethic and realized that she and her family would be well served by her productivity during her time off from school.

The subject of summer employment arose in the conversations I had with McKenna and her cousin, Roy. After some consideration, McKenna decided to pursue a job as a camp counselor because she loved working with young children. Roy tried to discourage this, explaining that it was very exhausting work for minimal pay. McKenna, replied, "Everyone tells me this, but, seriously, I love working with kids."

She clearly meant what she said because she landed a job at a summer day camp. She worked five days each week from early morning until evening tending a group of eight three year old campers. When I asked her how she liked the job, she beamed, " Oh it was so much fun! I loved it!" She explained that she loved the kids in her charge, she formed friendships with the other counselors, and she thoroughly enjoyed talking with the children's parents at various times during the camp sessions. Although she worried a bit

about pleasing the camp directors, she was ultimately satisfied with this aspect of the job as well. She spoke confidently,

I treated my kids like gold.... The [directors] told me, "Well, out of all the groups here, you have your kids under control, and we can see you [deal with] your kids well, and [when you're leading your kids], when the kids are far behind you, you stop and wait until they catch up. Most people just walk and leave their kids behind."

Toward the end of the summer, the parent of one of the campers called McKenna and offered her a job as a care giver for her children during the school year. McKenna was considering the position when she got another offer from her local school district. This job was as a leader in the district's after-school program. McKenna decided to accept the second position because it required her to perform duties somewhat similar to those she had experienced much success with over the summer.

As I write this, McKenna is prospering in her role as a leader in the after-school program. She works 20 hours each week during the public school year. She's involved in different activities with the children under her care, from playing games and getting them snacks to helping them with their homework and teaching them how to cook. She was proud to tell me that the program's director is quite pleased with her performance and asked her help in finding another person to work with them. McKenna has never missed a day at the after-school program, and she made sure to plan her spring schedule around her job. She even gave up an opportunity to travel during the college's recent "spring break" because she would have had to take time off from this work. She and her parents are pleased by her sense of responsibility toward her job.

McKenna's Friendships and Good Times

When McKenna mentioned her interest in securing a job working with children, I knew immediately that she and the children would thrive. I had witnessed her interactions with Shamel, the young son of another of my student-collaborators, Destiny Jordan. On several occasions, Destiny met with McKenna and me, bringing Shamel along to visit with us also. I remember one situation vividly. McKenna, Destiny, Shamel, and I went out to dinner. Our date was set for a March evening, and despite a relentless torrent of cold rain, we managed to keep our engagement. Shamel was dressed for the weather, and the required outerwear was somewhat cumbersome. McKenna took over Shamel's care at the restaurant, giving his patient, but tired, mom a break. She removed his raincoat and assorted other raingear, and secured him comfortably in his booster seat at our table, conversing animatedly with him all the while. When he became restless and anxious to inspect the restaurant itself, she confidently slipped him out of his chair and took him for a "walk" about the establishment while his mom and I watched in appreciation. She eventually took him for a few "strolls" that evening while we lingered in the restaurant enjoying our food, conversation, and shelter from the rain.

I was particularly taken with the easy, yet genuine, rapport I witnessed between my two students. The opportunity to nurture friendships is a concern of mine for the young men and women who enroll at the college of 23,000 full and part-time students. Although I also commuted to college and never experienced the potential intimacy of dorm life, I attended a very small school where firm friendships were formed quite freely. I marveled that these two young women, who were in many ways at such different points in their lives, could become comfortable friends so readily. Since their schedules at the

college are not necessarily conducive to this, I attribute their friendship to their warm personalities and McKenna's good-natured appreciation of Destiny's son.

Conversations about McKenna's friends and friendships appear consistently throughout the transcriptions of our meetings. McKenna makes friends easily and takes responsibility for her friendships. She is a loyal, sensitive, and supportive friend who is grateful for the friendship she receives in return.

When her after-school program director asked her to recommend another person to work with them, McKenna called her friend Jill, a young woman she met through her summer job. McKenna knew that Jill would be an appropriate choice for the position based on their shared experience at the day camp. Jill has been working at the program for the last several months, and all involved are pleased with the way things are working out. McKenna and Jill actually see quite a bit of each other these days since Jill is also a student at the college. The two women commute together to school as their schedules permit.

McKenna also reminisces about friendships she experienced growing up and in high school. She attributes the change in her attitude toward school, at least in part, to the modeling provided by a young woman she befriended during her junior year of high school. McKenna's friend was a strong student who encouraged McKenna to reconsider her negative views of school. McKenna has assured me from the outset of our investigation that the McKenna Green I know has evolved from her former self and that friends and family have helped her blossom. She said her friends have noticed this metamorphosis of sorts. In response to my incredulity over her stories of her problematic attitude and behavior in school, she offered, "I was hanging out last weekend

with friends I haven't seen in two years, and they [said], 'You're such a changed person.' Yep, that's how they see me, and that's kids saying that."

While her strong will and determination may have been troublesome in terms of her compliance with school regulations, they seem to have served her well in her life outside of the classroom. McKenna's cousin, and dear friend, Roy, attested to her strong personality. He laughingly told me that he had long ago given up trying to change McKenna's mind when she felt strongly about something. He said that he'd come to realize that when she held on to an opinion tightly, it was because she was right. He observed further that McKenna has the ability to make him and their other friends happy. He explained, "She just always makes people laugh.... Our whole family and the people we hang out with, all my friends, [say to McKenna], 'Oh, come back here' because they enjoy her company so much." Cara, McKenna's sister, confirmed Roy's view. She told me that when McKenna's friends call or visit her at home, they ask her family, "Where's the mayor?" a reference to her role as their leader.

Through the course of our investigation, McKenna and I have shared many conversations about her relationships with various friends. Time and again, I have observed her sensitivity toward those she knows and loves well and those she meets casually. Whether it is in befriending unlikely people at a pub frequented by young adults in the area or extending herself to old friends who are troubled, McKenna has a natural ability to put herself in others' shoes, to respond with gentle firmness to difficult situations, and to appreciate others for who they are even if they are not at all like her.

The Larger Picture

When I examine the story McKenna and I have told in terms of the questions that initially guided this inquiry, I am compelled to consider both the contrasts and the consistencies of her life. The picture she offers of her academic experiences prior to college might, for example, lead Needham (1994) to include her among "the pink-cheeked, unenlightened high school graduates," who enter college trying "to continue their high school hijinks by titillating the instructor, disregarding attendance policies, skipping out during class breaks, and showing up late for class" and who view college "as a time and place to have fun, to ignore family and school restrictions" (p. 22).

However, the strategies she uses to secure her membership in the college community point to just the opposite. They indicate that once she was free to "choose" her educational path, rather than have it dictated to her, she became purposeful, diligent, and effective. Her performance in the high school classroom may have been fraught with negative affect and behavior, yet her demeanor in college is directed and fruitful, rewarding not only McKenna, but all of us who work with her. She is not a "pink-cheeked" girl, but a maturing young woman who is an asset to our academy.

So, then, why did she resist her earlier schooling? Is the answer related to the strong sense of will she has displayed since she was five and would not wear the purple gown? The reason for the purple gown seems to have become clear to McKenna when she entered the bride's home and observed for herself the festive nature of the occasion. She responded by embracing the day and executing her tasks flawlessly.

Did she cease to resist authority when school began to seem reasonable to her? When she left the rules of the private schools for schools where she saw task completion

as a "choice" rather than a demand, did she meet, rather than reject, the challenges posed by these tasks? When I consider the story Ms.Green told about McKenna's experience as a flower girl in the context of her subsequent behavior throughout school, I am reminded of McKenna's repeated references to the notion of choosing for herself what, why, and how she would learn. As Gilmore (1985) in her study of displays of resistance among school children states, "Expressive forms of [observably negative behavior] can be seen as a message of individual... autonomy in the face of authority.... [Such] face-saving devices... allow for pride and ownership in circumstances where opportunities for such prizes are scarce" (p. 124-125).

Perhaps McKenna's successful senior year of high school and very presence in college are the direct products of her pride in her own decisions. Surely, they are results of her years of rebellion in school. The work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) has found that for many women "moments of rebellion ... produced turning points in their education" (p. 209). Furthermore, because she has had the opportunity to make these decisions, she may be ready to recognize what she, like "every woman, regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, and academic achievement, need[s] to know[:] that she is capable of intelligent thought" (Belenky, et al., p. 193). She may now be prepared to see that through her own agency and the facilitation provided by the members of her college community, she "[can give] birth to [her] own ideas, making [her] tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it" (Belenky, et al., p. 217). As Belenky et al. also observe, "In 'real talk' domination is absent, reciprocity and cooperation are prominent" (p. 146). McKenna no longer needs to assert her independence by sitting recalcitrantly or ignoring her teachers' directives; rather she can share the knowledge and

capabilities she brings to school as she connects with others to construct meaning in and out of the classroom.

McKenna is the first to acknowledge that she comes to college with a troubled high school record. Despite, or perhaps because of this, she is in many ways eminently qualified for her pursuit of higher education, and we, as members of the academy, have much to learn from her. McKenna wants to be in school. She has consciously chosen to be here. She intuitively understands that this is in "essence [a] moral decision... [in the sense that she must be] willing to accept the responsibility of that choice" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 67). She is committed to the task of college. She wants to learn what the academy's coursework and members have to teach. She also wants to contribute to the education of all of us who share our classrooms and conversations with her. Her outstanding attendance record confirms this. McKenna has been present in all but three class sessions in the three semesters she's been enrolled in college. (She suffered a stomach virus in the Spring 1998 term.) Moreover, her demeanor in the classroom and across the campus attests to her seriousness of purpose and inquisitive mind.

McKenna's story demonstrates that she is an inquirer. She questions why things are the way they are and how else they might be. Whether it is in terms of the value of purple gowns or alternatives to the traditional American family lifestyle, McKenna wonders what and why. Her family and friends hold that this quality is intrinsic to her nature. Although they are frustrated by it at times, they appreciate her for it. Abbott (1994) would recognize and even celebrate this capability in McKenna. He says, "Learners are not passive receptacles into which knowledge is poured" (p. 9). Rather they must be actively engaged in the learning process. He explains that in order to

function in an increasingly ambiguous world, it is necessary that learners be able to "deal with ambiguity and uncertainty and, especially, be creative and personally enterprising" (1995, p. 7). When McKenna questions the world in which she finds herself, resisting or embracing it as she sees fit, she exhibits these abilities.

Despite this strength of mind and the determined will with which she acts upon her views, McKenna is acutely aware of the concerns of others in the world in which we all live. She sympathizes only when she cannot empathize. She is able to "develop procedures for gaining access [connecting] to other people's knowledge.... seeing the other not in [her] own terms but in the other's terms" (Belenky, et al., 1997, p. 113). For example, she is able, in hindsight, to put herself in the place of the high school officials whose rules she saw as arbitrary when she was confronted with them. In defense of the teacher who pushed her physically when they conflicted about some regulation, McKenna explained that she was a resistant student who frustrated the school authorities. She also mentioned meeting that teacher on several recent occasions when she went to the high school to pick up her younger sister, Kelly. She spoke of having pleasant conversations with her. She even offered, "She's actually pretty cool."

McKenna's sensitivity is apparent also in her dealings with her family and friends. They acknowledge her "heart" and love her for it as well as for the firm manner in which she acts upon this sensitivity. Whether it is dealing with crises or "hanging out" on the day to day, McKenna is at the center of her family's life and the "mayor" of her friends.

McKenna's story indicates that she is as resourceful as she is sensitive. She knows intuitively what's expected of her in various situations, and she decides for herself how to meet the challenges she faces. She understands that as a family member she must

support her family, so she does, simply and naturally, without reservation. She also knows what she needs to do to help the children she works with thrive at their after-school program. She understands that she must be present at work without fail because the children depend upon her for their care and good times. She's always there, and she puts all her effort into her job while she's performing it. Moreover, McKenna is not only sensitive to her friends or the people she encounters on the social scene, she is able to employ this sensitivity to guide her conversations and her actions. Whether it is urging Alan "to run" so she can follow him, or picking Kelly up when she is stranded at the beach, McKenna is consistent, supportive, and reliable. Throughout the circumstances of her life, she is able "to solve problems," exhibiting another of the competencies Abbott (1995, p. 7) and most of us would consider essential to the assumption of an active role in contemporary society.

Although McKenna is still hesitant about herself as a student, she acknowledges her capabilities in the other aspects of her life. For example, she knows she has a friendly, appealing personality even though she attributes her belief in this, not to her own assessment, but to the assurances of her family and friends, "Everyone says out of all of us I am the most outgoing." Modesty, perhaps, makes her reluctant to state this view directly, but the willingness with which she offered me her loved ones' description of her indicates the confidence she has in it. She also knows that she knows how to act and react in a variety of circumstances. She stated, for example, that she knew when her sister was in the confrontation with the other young woman, it would be best "to just get Kelly out of there," rather than risk exacerbating the situation through prolonged discussion. She simply brought her sister home.

She is also aware that she possesses the sensitivity others attest to see in her. When her mother became involved in a car accident, McKenna acknowledged feeling sorry for her mother because Ms. Green was upset at the damage to her car. McKenna has mentioned repeatedly her sympathy for her cousins, Alan and Roy, over their mother's accident. Her compassion for her parents in their dealings with their problematic extended families has been consistently evident throughout the conversations McKenna and I have shared during our investigation.

Unfortunately, the self-confident McKenna still walks gingerly through her academic life. Many years of troubled affect and performance in school impede, in McKenna's view, the effort she exerts in college. Although she acknowledges her outstanding attendance, commitment to classroom activities, and prompt completion of assignments, McKenna still sees herself as "not the best student." This causes her to worry that when she is uncomfortable in a classroom situation, she will perform poorly. She does acknowledge, however, that she negotiated her introductory sociology course by getting to know the instructor and her classmates, as well as by contributing to the activities and procedures of the class. Hopefully, she will remain mindful of this success as she continues to counter her earlier student history.

Despite her lingering concerns, McKenna is using her personal resources to facilitate her college life. Often, when McKenna and I are together at school, students or faculty members approach her, and they exchange a cheerful hello and a comment or question about a shared class. She has mentioned on several occasions over the course of our investigation calling or seeking students out on campus to converse about course contents or assignments. Much as it did in our reading class, her consistent, active

engagement in her classes seems to have marked her as "connected" (Belenky, et al., 1997) to her classmates and a leader among them. By positioning herself in this manner, McKenna benefits from, as she contributes to, the classroom dynamic.

So, then, the McKenna Green who "did not care" about school or academic matters when she was growing up acknowledges caring very much about her current performance. She takes responsibility for her progress and uses her capabilities to assume an active, independent role in insuring it. In the process, McKenna Green contributes to the growth of each of us who are members of the academy.

CHAPTER 4

A Gentleman with Style:

A Portrait of Julius E. Villa

Entree

Although my Fall 1997, 2 p.m. Reading 090 class was dominated by the contingent of seven football players which included Marcus Prince, there were eight other students in the section. At the beginning of the semester, most of them were rather quiet, perhaps because they were a bit overwhelmed by the enormous physical presence and outspoken voice of the "players." I was aware of this and worked at assuring all the students that it was both their right and obligation to be heard in our discussions. In recording notes about each class session, I made a deliberate effort to include comments from a variety of students. Nevertheless, my first mention of Julius E. Villa occurred fully two weeks after our course began. The unassuming young man, who always sat in the same spot in our circle of desks, seemed somewhat hesitant to offer his views about the issues raised by our reading. It was not until he finished his first book, Jay Bennett's The Executioner, that I cited his participation in our conversation.

Perhaps he was encouraged to speak because he had completed the book or he realized that he was required to tell us about his reading. I'd like to think that he spoke because he had started to become more comfortable in class. In any case, he seemed gratified by our response to his remarks since his novel, dealing with a drunk driving accident, prompted lively discussion and the recounting of related anecdotes.

Julius' name is mentioned more frequently in my class journal after this. However, on some occasions I recorded that he was "quiet," and I was anxious to make

sure he had the opportunity to engage in our sometimes chaotic, always animated, conversations. Eventually, I did note that he spoke a bit more freely and that we all enjoyed hearing from him. He brought an interesting perspective to our course. In a roomful of rambunctious football players, Julius was a high school soccer star, and he was playing that semester on the college's team, a squad that ultimately concluded its season with a national championship. We only learned that he was a soccer player when he was absent one day to attend a game at a distant school. Upon his return, I asked him where he had been; his reply surprised us all.

His quiet demeanor was fairly consistent throughout the term. He carried himself with a gentlemanly reserve. His dignified, if almost self-effacing, air complemented his appearance. Julius has handsome features, dark eyes, and thick chestnut brown hair, always meticulously cut and combed. His cheerful, slightly diffident, smile accompanied his response when any of us asked him a question. From time to time, he did initiate conversation, but, for the most part, his participation was prompted by one or another of us in the class.

A major requirement of the Reading Workshop format of Reading 090 is the completion of fourteen letters, eight to me and six to individual classmates, across the semester. In rereading Julius' letters, I am reminded that he wrote candidly and animatedly about his books and reading progress. As I often do in Reading Workshop, I learned more about him through our written correspondence than I did from our class discussions. I learned, for example, that he has a fine sense of humor, was anxious to make sure that his work fulfilled the course's assignments, and seemed sincerely concerned that I understand what he was reading and thinking about. When he finished

Stephen King's Thinner, he wrote, "Surprise! I finished Thinner. I guess it's about time, right? Well, it took a while because at first I disliked it, but after a while, I got to like it. This book was very big (I mean it had a lot of pages). I guess that's the real reason." He went on to synopsise the story for me, explaining his reason for doing so: "I've been writing all my letters to Ted (a classmate), so you might not know that much about my book." I had read my students' correspondence with each other, but I appreciated the summary and analysis of the story Julius wrote following his comment. He wanted to make sure that he presented me with sufficient evidence to convince me of his assessment of the book: "I guess that's why it's a best seller. Stephen King... gets into real details. I like that. I hope you got the picture. I hope the next book is as good as this one. C-Ya!"

While several of the letters Julius wrote were equally entertaining, he frequently missed their due dates. Since the course revolves around the continuous flow of correspondence, Julius and I were often confused about his fulfillment of his responsibilities to our class. Despite his winning, somewhat chagrined, apologies, I was eventually forced to warn him that this problem was jeopardizing his successful completion of our course. The situation was exacerbated when he did not submit the course's final project, a portfolio assigned in conjunction with the English class that was paired with ours.

Julius' English professor and I were talking about how this would obligate him to repeat both reading and English as we walked across campus to attend our department's holiday party on the very last day of the semester. All of a sudden, a car braked abruptly along our path. Julius leaned out of its window and handed us his portfolio, grinning apologetically and attempting to explain himself.

Julius E. Villa was not the first student we've ever had who submitted his portfolio at the last possible moment, nor I suspect will he be the last. However, this precluded us from having an end-of-the-semester conference. He learned that he had passed our course and had placed into the next level of non-credit reading when he registered for the subsequent spring term. He had actually scored high enough on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test to skip this next level, but he did not have the required 85 course average, largely because of his issues with attendance and due dates. So without our discussing his progress or the course itself, Julius enrolled in Reading 001.

As I prepared during the winter inter-session to work individually with my four student-collaborators, I learned from one of them that he wouldn't be returning to the college that spring. Although he expressed willingness to participate in this investigation anyway, we eventually concluded that our schedules would make it impossible for us to meet regularly.

I was left in a bit of a quandary. I was still wondering what to do when I ran into Julius on the first day of the Spring 1998 term. His warm hello encouraged me to ask him quite spontaneously if he remembered the discussions we'd had in class about my study and if he would be willing to participate. His response was an immediate "yes." To my delight, he explained that he had been considering offering to collaborate with me but had concluded that I "already had students, so [I] didn't need [him]."

As I did with each of my student-collaborators, I asked him to talk his decision over with his family. When we got together a few days later, he assured me that his family was willing for him to work with me.

Learning about Julius

Julius and I met to begin our investigation a week after I had started working with my other students. I began our conversation by asking him why he wanted to participate, a question that had prompted a candid response when I posed it to Marcus Prince. Julius replied with a similar frankness, one that I remembered from his letters: "For people to understand that people have a second chance coming to [the community college], people like me. I wanted to go to another school, a four year school, but since my grades were poor, I couldn't get in." He elaborated, "My recruiter had told me I could go [to the four year school] because of soccer."

Julius told me that both he and his family were disappointed when this did not work out. However, they were reassured when his high school guidance counselor explained that the community college, which is conveniently located within walking distance of Julius' home, was a viable alternative since it offered him both the academic and athletic opportunities he sought. This initial glimpse of Julius' and his parents' view of his college pursuit piqued my curiosity. He had said very little about his family during the fall semester, so I was anxious to learn more about him and them.

Julius and the Villas

Julius and I talked weekly for the Spring 1998 semester and consistently, although less frequently, after that. We still get together fairly regularly. The reticence he had exhibited as a student in my class disappeared as we got to know each other, and our conversations have yielded interesting stories. I also met frequently with Camilla, his girlfriend, and went to lunch on different occasions with Julius, Camilla, and his cousins, James and Joe. I spoke with his mother and his sister, Jessica, over the phone and visited

his former high school to talk with his teacher-mentor and friend, Ms. Beverly Manetta. I also interviewed his coach at the college. Through this, I learned about Julius from a variety of perspectives.

He was born on November 21, 1978 to a young couple still in high school. Julius' father actually attended the high school from which Julius graduated, and his mother was a student in a neighboring school. When Julius was a young boy, both his parents worked long hours to save money to buy a house. Julius lived several days a week with his dad's grandparents. His parents would visit him during the hours they were not working and he was awake. When he was eight, his parents bought a house, and Julius, his parents, and his sister, Jessica, who is four years younger than he, moved in it together.

Both sides of Julius' family are originally from Central American countries: his mother's from El Salvador and his father's from Guatemala. Julius' great-grandparents spoke Spanish in their home, so Julius became fluent. Also, many members of Julius' family remain in their native countries. Julius has visited both El Salvador and Guatemala. He particularly enjoyed his visit to Guatemala where he stayed on the farms owned by his dad's relatives. He also makes frequent trips to Miami, Florida to visit an aunt's family. Julius' cousins, Mikey, James, and Joe, are his close friends. They spend extended periods of time together when their schedules permit.

Julius has spoken often of different family members. When I became confused about the relationships between and among his family members, we used McKenna Green's method to illustrate his family and drew a family tree. From this, I learned that Julius' family is quite large. There are many people from various generations whose ages

overlap with relatives in another generation, so, according to Julius, the generations are closely bonded. Most of the family live and work in the vicinity, and the different great-grandparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins share time and resources readily.

Perhaps this camaraderie helps to reinforce an appreciation of the Latino culture from which very nearly the entire family originates. Since Julius did not speak of his familiarity with his Latino roots when he was a student in my class, I had no idea that he traveled so freely between two very different cultures. I did not know, for example, that he is fluent in Spanish and that he and his family speak Spanish or "Spanglish," a combination of Spanish and English, at home. I also did not know that the form of "Spanglish" spoken by the Villas is very different from that used by his girlfriend, Camilla's, family members, who originate from Puerto Rico rather than Central America, and that Julius is comfortable with that form as well.

The extent of his family's attachment to their Latino traditions became clear to me when Julius shared a photo album and professionally made video of his sister Jessica's sixteenth birthday or "Sweet Sixteen" celebration. This type of party, which honors the "coming of age" of a young woman, is popular in many areas of the U.S. Jessica's "Sweet Sixteen" had occurred during the semester Julius was a student in my class.

The party was conducted in the tradition of a "Quinceanera," although it was held when Jessica turned sixteen, in the U.S. tradition, rather than fifteen, as the name and the Latino culture imply. I've read about such celebrations, but I've never attended one. While the video was narrated and the words of the participants were recorded, the dialogue was completely in Spanish. I don't speak this language, so my son, who studies

it in school, watched it with me and attempted to translate. As we watched, I realized that I was missing much of what was being said. At the same time, it became evident that Julius played an integral part in the various rites that marked the occasion.

Later, I spoke with Julius about the "Quinceanera," and he helped clarify the significance of the various traditions I had witnessed. He told me that the family prepared for the events for months, choreographing and rehearsing the different parts of the celebration. The affair was held at a Latino club, reserved exclusively for the event, in a community near the Villa home. The family arrived by limousine. All were formally attired: Julius and his dad in tuxedos, Ms. Villa in a gorgeous gold, crushed-velvet dress, and Jessica in a pink satin gown that reminded me of something from a fairy tale. As is custom, her entry into the banquet hall was marked by a procession. Her parents and her court of honor, including Julius, walked into the club to welcoming music. Jessica arrived on the arm of her boyfriend, who served as her formal escort. On her feet, she wore pink satin slippers. During the ceremony, she removed her slippers, a reminder of her childhood, and her father slipped high-heeled shoes, the symbol of adulthood, onto her feet. The guests watched the various aspects of the ceremony intently, applauding to celebrate the rites of passage. A party followed with music, dancing, food, congratulatory remarks, and good wishes.

A master of ceremonies, a deejay from a Spanish-speaking radio station, orchestrated the affair. He spoke exclusively in Spanish, so I did not understand what he said, but the guests responded enthusiastically to his commentary about the Villa family. The only use of English I observed was when Julius concluded his congratulatory remarks, complimenting his sister's beauty and maturity with, "I love you, Jessica." Also,

an occasional guest wished Jessica a "Happy Birthday." One verse of the song by the same name was sung in English, while several others were performed in Spanish.

The video presented the Villas as proud and joyful on this occasion. When Jessica and I spoke about Julius, she mentioned how touched she was by Julius' words at her party. She explained that Julius' remarks, offered publicly in front of all her guests, are typical of his "very generous" nature. "He's a loving guy," she assured me as she told me that her memories of her childhood center around the time spent playing and bickering with Julius.

Julius' family has recently had another occasion to celebrate. His mother gave birth to a little girl in July 1998. Since Julius is 20 and Jessica is 16, baby Jenna has brought quite a burst of new life to the Villa family. Julius told me about his mom's pregnancy when we first got together for our investigation. I asked him if he had any siblings other than his sister Jessica. He seemed delighted, if almost a little incredulous, when he replied, "My mother is pregnant right now; she's happy; she's starting all over.... My father's happy; he brings [my mother] donuts.... Everyone's happy.... They're taking my room, and I'm moving downstairs. I volunteered.... The baby has to be near my mother."

Julius' concern for his mother's well-being during her pregnancy, along with his joy over his sister's birth, were recurring topics of our conversation during the summer and fall of 1998. He was quite protective of his mom and often mentioned performing chores around the house that she would otherwise have had to do. He worried about her coming home from work tired; he tried to have everything in order so she would be able to relax at the end of the day.

When Jenna was first born, he acknowledged being "too nervous" to be alone with her, but as Jenna grows and prospers, so does Julius' confidence in caring for her. Jessica mentioned that since she and her parents work most Saturdays, Julius cares for Jenna if his father does not need him on the job. His delight in his baby sister prompted him to stop by my office one day with a series of photos he and Camilla had taken of her. I got to see Jenna in a variety of outfits, poses, and expressions. As I write this, Julius has promised to bring her to visit; I look forward to it.

While Julius is devoted to his mom and sisters, he has spoken most frequently throughout our inquiry about his father. Julius and his dad are friends and co-workers as well as father and son. They share a love of soccer and often play the game together. From time to time, Mr. Villa sponsors a team through his business, and Julius, his uncles, and cousins are involved with it.

The World Cup, a major soccer tournament, held only once every four years, occurred the summer that Jenna was born. Julius and his dad ordered a special cable television system, so that they could watch the entire series of games. Julius taped every one of them; he and his father and uncles got to enjoy them even if they were at work when they were originally aired. Julius' enthusiasm was catching, compelling me to tune in a few of the matches myself. Although my children played soccer when they were very young, I had no experience with the sport at more competitive levels. Julius taught me to appreciate this international game and afforded me the opportunity to witness a variety of nations battling for recognition through this sporting event.

While Julius and Mr. Villa bond through their common interest in soccer, Julius' relationship with his father is grounded, beyond this shared pastime, in the love and

respect Julius feels for him. It is also rooted in his appreciation of his father's efforts to earn a comfortable living for his family. Julius witnesses his father's work quite closely because he frequently works with him.

The Villas' Business and Julius' Work

Julius' dad is an independent contractor in the area of fire and damage clean up and repair to commercial, industrial, and residential buildings. Since fires, floods, and other catastrophic events cannot usually be anticipated, Mr. Villa must be on call at all hours of day and night to respond quickly when situations arise. Often, he is summoned to the scene as fire fighters or other emergency personnel are just leaving it. While his dad has a number of employees, Julius said that very often several calls come in at the same time, so Julius is needed. Also, quite a few of Mr. Villa's employees do not speak English; therefore, they cannot explain or, if necessary, negotiate their company's role in various clean up and restoration projects. If problems arise simultaneously (which they often do in the case of bad weather), Julius must be available to manage one of the sites.

During the course of this study, Julius has told me quite a few stories about his work for his father. One time, for example, he and his dad were called to an apartment house in Brooklyn in response to a flood caused by a burst pipe. As they surveyed the mess, Mr. Villa began to photograph the damage while Julius walked through the apartment to determine the most expeditious approach to the clean-up. The apartment's resident accompanied Julius and soon started talking to him. In his conversation, the man revealed that he was depressed over his mother's recent death. Julius and the resident spoke as Julius vacuumed up the water which had seeped throughout the apartment and his father continued to photograph the destruction. The place was filled with clothes,

books, watches, and assorted collectibles. While Julius worked, the owner followed him, explaining the apartment's contents and talking about his job as the director of a private school. Julius responded to the man's conversation by offering sympathetic remarks and his ear to someone who needed one. Eventually the man commented to Julius, "You're a nice guy."

The next day, Julius' dad returned to the site alone. Julius explained, "I didn't go. I had school, and I was going [to be in school] late for some reason. And [the owner] said to my father, 'Where's your son? Oh no, take this shirt, give [your son] this shirt.'" The man gave Julius a collectible Houston Astros baseball jersey. Julius and his dad were thrilled, not only by the gift of the jersey, but also by the good will it implied.

Julius seems pleased with his working relationship with his dad. He commented that he often meets interesting people or enters unusual places. This arrangement must work well for Mr. Villa too since he knows he can rely on Julius' capable assistance. I cannot help but think further that father and son must appreciate the security implied in their business relationship, especially in the context of a traumatic incident that occurred when Julius was employed elsewhere.

Julius worked over the summer before his senior year of high school as a sales and stock clerk for a branch of a large national auto parts store. One day, after he assisted an elderly customer in the store's parking lot, he came upon several youths loitering near the store. When one of the young women in the group greeted him, he smiled and nodded in response. This angered one of the young men with her who perceived Julius' "hello" as a flirtatious gesture. The next day, the young man returned to the store with several other youths. They approached Julius, asking him for help in determining what

was wrong with their ailing car, which they claimed was in the parking lot. Julius did not recognize the man who asked for assistance and followed him out to the parking lot to help him. As he left the store, he was assaulted by this young man and his accomplices. Julius was cut with a box cutter on his hands and across his face.

The police were summoned to the scene by passersby who witnessed the attack. The attackers were arrested, and Julius was driven by ambulance to the hospital where his cuts were stitched. Since his father was working and his mother was in El Salvador visiting family, his aunt and his girlfriend came to the hospital and took him home.

Word of the incident spread quickly through his family. His uncles wanted to retaliate. Julius related one uncle's reaction: "My uncle is young, and he [said] he has lots of friends..., but I told him 'no.' My girlfriend was crying 'cause she thought I was gonna [get] back, 'cause I have lots of friends.... But I said, 'I'm not gonna do anything.'" Although the entire family was upset by the assault, Julius knew that revenge would only escalate the violence and provoke more trouble.

Currently, Julius has an order of protection against his attacker who was convicted of assault in this matter. In addition, Julius pursued a civil case against the auto parts chain. He feels his security was jeopardized when his manager, in a misguided attempt to ensure the safety of the customers in the store, locked the store's door, thereby preventing Julius from re-entering as he tried to escape his attackers. Julius secured an attorney, and they sought justice. The incident attracted the attention of former New York City Mayor, Ed Koch, who currently acts as a judge on People's Court, a popular television show. Julius was asked to present his case before the People's Court. He declined, explaining that he wanted to handle it before a traditional court of law. Eventually Julius won his

suit. He shared his financial settlement with his sister, enabling her to buy a car. Julius explained that Jessica is hoping to pursue a nursing career; he wants to help her get to and from a local hospital in which she has begun volunteering.

Julius told me about this incident several months after we began working together. Fortunately, his only noticeable physical scar is a very fine line that looks like a scratch on the side of his face. It bothers him a bit; I think because it reminds him of the painful episode. Yet, his response was thoughtful and deliberate as he addressed the incident according to the complicated conventions of the U.S. legal system. In any case, Julius has worked almost exclusively for his dad since this occurrence.

This arrangement seems to work for his dad as well. Julius has told me repeatedly throughout our investigation that his parents are anxious for him to put his effort, not into different jobs, but into school. I've asked him several times to elaborate on this; he has reiterated his parents' sentiments. "[My parents] think it's great [that I'm in school]. I was going to get a part-time job, [in addition to my work with my dad], but my father said, 'you don't have to; stay in school.' He doesn't want me to slack off."

Julius' Goals and Dreams, Outlooks and Opinions

While Julius works as frequently and strenuously as his job for his dad demands, his career goals lie elsewhere. He explained, "My father, if they call him at four o'clock in the morning, he'll get up and go to work. He'll do anything to get the food on the table. I don't want that. I want to be able to sleep, wake up,... go on vacation, go to school, pay my bills."

When I asked him how he planned to accomplish this, he answered very directly, without any of the reticence that had marked his demeanor in our class.

I like business, and I want to open my own business - a night club.... I told my parents about it; actually, I give [Camilla] ideas about it, and she thinks I'm crazy. I'm always dreaming, [but I'm] not [merely] dreaming; I want to do stuff.... I know what I'm going to name it: "Cafe Stylos".... Style; people will be attracted to [it].

He explained that he will use the knowledge and insights he gains from his business major at our college to facilitate his entrepreneurship. Often when Julius is talking about his plans for his club, he tosses ideas about for other similar ventures. "I'm going to open a club, but I'm not going to just base my income on that club." He has said that he knows it will take years for the club to become profitable, but when it does, "I'm going to get money from it, but I'm not going to waste it like some people do. I'm not going to buy a brand new car, a new house. I'll have a nice decent apartment or rent a house. But then I'll invest my money in another type of business." His ideas for these enterprises run the gamut from cafes to barber shops with entertainment centers in them for customers to use while they're waiting for a haircut.

While Camilla may scoff at some of Julius' plans, she acknowledges and respects his determination. She predicts that Julius, "will be someone someday.... He knows what he wants, and he goes for it.... Even my sister and my friends know that [about Julius]."

Julius' personal aspirations are influenced by his views on American politics, policies, and society. He wants the best of American life, and he wants America to remain focused in securing its promises to its people. Throughout the course of our investigation, Julius has brought social issues into our conversations, offering his opinion and seeking mine. He spoke, for example, about the importance of appropriating funds for AIDS research and, on another occasion, about the relationship between legal issues

and moral concerns. Julius' conversational initiatives have presented both of us with opportunities to explore matters beyond our immediate daily concerns as well as to apply larger principles to our individual circumstances.

Julius' Schooling

One of my concerns for Julius is based on my recollection of his performance in our class in conjunction with his recurring observation that his presence in school is directly related to his hope for his future. He has frequently commented that he sees college as the fulfillment of his earlier education and a critical part of his career plans. He seems quite serious about these beliefs, but I am unable to forget that he had trouble fulfilling our course's requirements in a timely matter. Seeking reassurance that he has been growing in this area, I have asked him about his history as a student and his college coursework at virtually all of our meetings. His responses indicate that his views of school contrast with those of my other student-collaborators although his student behaviors are in some ways similar.

Elementary school.

Julius speaks fondly about his elementary school teachers and experiences. He seems to have enjoyed himself throughout school despite his frustration in his primary years over the conflict between the English he was expected to read and write in class and the Spanish that was the language of his home. He remembers struggling with his schoolwork since his parents were working, and his great-grandparents, who did not speak the language of his school, could not help him. "When I studied, I had to do it myself, and it was kind of hard."

He told me that he did receive reinforcement from resource room teachers after it was determined that he is learning disabled and would benefit from their support. When I consider the differences between Julius' home and school languages, along with his facile use of English in college, I wonder about the accuracy of his "LD" label, much as I wonder about the impact of Tree's size on his elementary school teachers' expectations of his performance. In any case, Julius acknowledges that he eventually became rather casual about his academic obligations in elementary school even though he always liked his teachers very much. He reminisced about one teacher, in particular, who used parties to motivate her class. Since Julius has always loved a party, this really worked for him.

High school.

The joie-de-vivre that accompanied Julius through elementary school continued into high school. He speaks affectionately of that school and his teachers. He is the only one of my four collaborators who asked me to visit his high school and meet a faculty member, Ms. Beverly Manetta, his resource room teacher throughout his four years at the school. When I called her to ask for a meeting, she explained that she'd be glad to talk with me and had been awaiting my call. Julius had told her about our investigation and secured her permission before giving me her number.

Although Julius' community neighbors mine, and I know several other students from his high school, I had never visited it before I went there to meet Ms. Manetta. Her room is on the building's second floor, at the far end of a long hallway, so I had an opportunity to explore much of the school as I located our meeting site. On the day of my visit, Julius' high school was cheerfully decorated with hallways lined in calligraphied quotes from famous people honored through a notice indicating that "February is Black

History Month." "Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom," suggested George Washington Carver. "My world did not shrink because I was a black female writer. I just got bigger," offered Toni Morrison, and "Few are too young, and none are too old to make the attempt to learn," advised Booker T. Washington.

Student artwork; notices of meetings, games, and contests; and a giant mural of various overlapping athletic events graced every available surface of the corridors. Signs warned students that no walkmen, radios, or hats were permitted in the classrooms. A banner proclaimed, "March is Women's History Month." Julius' high school seemed like an inviting, bustling place.

Ms. Manetta's room complemented the hallways. It too was welcoming, with desks and tables arranged in groups and separately, books and resource materials displayed and available, and personal computers flashing invitations to be used. Ms. Manetta greeted me warmly and summarized briefly her history of 22 years in the district. Julius' assessment of her as a strong, insightful teacher, who is also a mentor and friend to her students, seemed appropriate to me after spending an hour with Ms. Manetta. She is, in fact, called a "TC," or "Teacher-Consultant." This title encompasses her roles as a teacher and a mentor or consultant. She works on an individual or small group basis with the same students throughout their four years of high school.

In this capacity, she had gotten to know Julius quite well over his high school years. She mentioned further that was working during the Spring 1998 semester with Jessica, Julius' sister. She seemed genuinely fond of Julius and proud of the relationship she had cultivated with him. She said, "I think I can do it," a motto of sorts that Julius coined for himself, was an effective motivating strategy. She noted that from time to

time, Julius would become distracted by his sports, friends, or romances, and she would help him refocus his efforts according to this adage. His athletic pursuits were for Julius, like many of the students with whom Ms. Manetta works, a strong impetus to do well in school. Athletic eligibility at Julius' school is based on academic performance.

Ms. Manetta noted that it did not surprise her that Julius went on to college after high school. "He's a plugger," she said, "a functioning, productive member of society." She stated further that Julius studied half of every day in his junior and senior years of high school in a program that taught computer proficiency through the state's Board of Cooperative Educational Services. He traveled to a neighboring district to participate in this program. She said that he had discussed this option to his educational plan with her, and they had concluded that this would work well for him. He had exhibited an interest in and aptitude for computers, and he needed the academic sequence the course of study provided to fulfill graduation requirements.

Ms. Manetta also spoke of Julius' winning manner and athletic accomplishments. She observed that he had been a popular student in school; his personality and athletic prowess combined to make him attractive to students and faculty alike. Julius also knew how to share what he had to offer, reciprocating for the support he received from his teachers. She said, for example, that he regularly spent time in the resource room before and after school, demonstrating word processing programs to teachers. I laughed when Ms. Manetta told me this because Julius has helped me negotiate our department's computers as well.

Speaking with Ms. Manetta confirmed my impressions of Julius' high school experience. He seems to have done what he had to do to succeed through his own effort

and the help of Ms. Manetta. Yet, according to Julius, there were times when he could have done more. He mentioned "slacking off" in his senior year and needing a push from Ms. Manetta to complete his work. He still appreciates her.

Out of all the teachers in high school, she's the one that really helped me, encouraged me to work harder.... When I got into [tenth grade, the administrators] thought I shouldn't be in resource, but she just kept me there for extra periods, like study hall. She would just look at my work, and ... talk to my teachers... about me. She was like a guidance [counselor] to the guys.

Life in college.

Even though he placed into the highest level of non-credit, preparatory math, Julius entered college a bit disappointed to be attending our school and participating in our program. Nevertheless, he passed all his classes that first semester, albeit, in reading and English, at the very last moment. When we began working individually on this inquiry in the spring of 1998, he was enrolled in Math 102, a three credit statistics course, Reading 001 and English 001, the next courses in the non-credit, college-preparatory sequence, and Business 110, a three credit introductory course. From week to week, we discussed the various matters under study and his progress in each of these classes.

Julius' Reading 001 course was scheduled at 8 a.m., and Julius, like so many students enrolled in early morning classes, had problems with attendance and lateness. His instructor, a seasoned reading professor, recognized Julius' potential to do well right from the outset of the semester. She also knew that he was one of my student-collaborators, so from time to time she stopped by my office with an anecdote about his capable performance or lack of attendance. He scored well on her exams,

despite his absenteeism, and he did an outstanding job on the library research project that comprises a significant percentage of the course grade.

Although I offered Julius assistance in this and his other classes, he rarely sought my help. We mostly spent our weekly meeting time chatting about his classes and our daily lives or delving into the issues involved in answering our study's guiding questions. I did accompany Julius to the library, however, in order to assist him in securing the materials necessary for his reading research report. The notes I made of the occasion indicate that he took a serious, purposeful approach to this assignment. He utilized the library's computerized card catalog, as well as various cd-rom systems, to locate books and magazine articles on date rape, his research topic.

He was thoughtful and organized as he went about acquiring and recording the information he needed. He was quite facile at navigating the hunt and search menus of the various computerized sources he employed. He was deliberate and careful categorizing and labeling the materials he located. When we had trouble getting the library's photocopy machine to zoom in and enlarge an article, I left him dealing with it and went to get help. "Professor Berg, Professor Berg," he called in hushed tones after me, "I got it to work." I was struck as much by the title he used to address me as I was by his ability to manage the machine. Although, at my request, Julius usually refers to me by my first name, he is ever the gentleman, using the academy's formal language in its library, one of its more public sites.

Julius earned an A+ on that project; he and I were pleased. While Julius may sometimes take a casual approach to his daily classroom attendance and a slightly reserved approach to his conversation in class, he was focused and self-directed in

fulfilling his research assignment. He was also interested in the content of the articles he read to write his report. We talked about them and the issues they raised about date-rape at several of our meetings.

As he had in our reading class' end-of-the semester D.R.P. placement exam, Julius scored high enough on it at the end of Reading 001 to bypass the next level of non-credit reading. But, as was also the case in our class, he had earned slightly below the required 85 average in the course, largely due to attendance issues. His quiet confidence, capable performance, and personable manner convinced his instructor to overlook his average and allow him to skip the last class in the non-credit sequence. In explaining her decision to me, Professor Howard shook her head and smiled as she said, "Oh, he's capable, all right. He just needs to make sure he comes to class and does all the work." She commented further that his research project was "wonderful!" She was going to use it as a model for future students.

Julius did not manage this success in his math class. He became overwhelmed by the rate at which the coursework was presented and withdrew from the course rather than risk failing it.

He fared much better in his English 001 course. His instructor conducted the course informally, and two of his fellow soccer players, as well as a student who had been in our reading class, were among the other participants in it. Julius seems to have felt comfortable right from the outset. He spoke of the course enthusiastically and often brought me writing he had submitted in fulfillment of its assignments. He was particularly proud when he was able to show me copies of his work typed by his instructor for use as models in class. His description of a soccer field on a Sunday

morning was particularly vivid: "It was a bright early Sunday when my feet touched the fresh cut grass. The air smelled real good mixed with... the grass and smoke coming from the grills.... The day was so hot that I could taste the sweat on my lips...." On another occasion, his instructor shared with his class a free association piece he wrote about winning the national junior college soccer championship: "I zoned on the clock, waiting for the last seconds to pass; we scored and took it home; felt like crying...."

The final exam in English 001, like that of English 090 which Julius took the semester he was also in my reading course, is an essay that students must write during an individual class session in response to one of three prompts. Students prepare for it throughout the semester, and Julius often showed me work he did in this regard. Not only did these essays provide me with insights into Julius' ideas and opinions, but they also exhibited the lively rhetoric I remembered from his literary letters. His essays contrasted with the quiet control of his conversation.

For example, Julius wrote his final exam about talk shows, comparing and contrasting those where the host's goal is "to help out the public" and those where the host's purpose is "to hype up the public with crazy topics, violence, and foul language." He explained that the former shows would deal with issues like, "Lost and Found Lovers," while the latter would feature subjects like, "I'm Sleeping with Father." He concluded that smarmy talk shows, ironically enough, "win the public" because "that's show business!" Julius' essay graders must have been as entertained as I was by his dry look at the American viewing public; he passed the course and moved into English 101, a three credit composition course.

While Julius and I spoke weekly that spring about his reading, English, and math classes, we were most interested in his introductory business course. Julius immediately saw the potential of this course in helping him prepare for a future as an entrepreneur. The entire semester's work was conducted around a specific task: the establishment and financial management of a hypothetical minor league baseball team. Julius' instructor created this innovative teaching tool for his students, developing and revising it over time to incorporate the various aspects of the course's curriculum.

The students worked together in groups, presenting their plans and the progress of their venture across the semester. I got permission from Julius and his instructor to attend a class meeting during which Julius and his group were presenting their plans for financing and organizing their team. There were four people in Julius' group: three young men and one young woman. They all stood in front of the class, and each person discussed one aspect of their joint program. Julius introduced his group's presentation. He spoke clearly, if a bit softly, looking directly at his audience of students, his instructor, and me. His remarks were brief but appropriate to the group's representation of their plans for their team. The remainder of the presentation was divided among the other committee members although one young man dominated the group.

After Julius and his colleagues finished speaking, the instructor, assuming a brisk, business-like tone, walked up and backed down one of the aisles of desks in the classroom, asking the group very specific questions about their plans for their team. As he commented pointedly about one or another decision they had made, he sounded like a litigator conducting the cross-examination of witnesses at a trial. The group became

somewhat befuddled by this, but they reacted in good humor to Professor Garret's remarks.

Other groups outlined their proposals for their teams and attempted to rebut Professor Garret's questions during that class session as well. Julius participated from time to time in the audience's conversation about the various plans offered by the other presenters. When the groups were finished, Professor Garret explained the next steps in the process of establishing the various teams suggested by the class. The tasks involved acquiring demographic information about possible locations for a stadium to house the team. Julius volunteered to acquire this information for his group. He explained that he knows how to navigate the internet and could find what they needed. A few days later, when Julius and I met, he told me that he had obtained various facts and figures about cities in the southern part of the U.S. so that his group could determine the most favorable site for their new team.

Throughout the many conversations Julius and I had about this course, he brought up the application of what he was learning to his own business plans. He readily translated the issues involved in establishing a sports team to those that applied to opening a club. When we met at the end of the semester to plan his schedule, he explained that he was most anxious to take another business course. He really felt he had benefited from his participation in Business 110. We enrolled him in Law 103, an introductory business law class, for the fall term.

As I write this, Julius and I are in the midst of the Spring 1999 semester. We met regularly, though less frequently, throughout the Fall 1998 term. Unfortunately, Julius was somewhat disappointed with his courses during the fall. His business law instructor

was ill throughout much of the semester. The class was covered by various substitutes, and Julius thought it lacked continuity because of this. He fulfilled the course's requirements and earned his three credits, but he did not feel he gained the knowledge about business law he had looked forward to learning at the outset of the semester. He withdrew from his statistics course once again. He explained that he did poorly on the first two tests. Since the course was not required for his major, he decided to take a different math course during the spring term rather than jeopardize his academic standing by earning a low grade in statistics.

Julius was somewhat happier with his English 101 class. Camilla was a student in Julius' section of the course. He explained to me, and she confirmed, that she tends not to elaborate upon her ideas when she writes, so he was glad to be able to help her with this.

English 101 also gave Julius the opportunity to reflect on a variety of the social issues which interest him. He wrote an essay for a course assignment about the Declaration of Independence's application to contemporary American society, citing personal examples to illustrate how its promises do not always hold true. He employed the spirited rhetoric I had often seen contrasting with his politic spoken words. He entitled his piece, "Rights That Are Not My Rights." He wrote another essay about the effect of the Monica Lewinsky scandal on the office of the presidency. He learned how to use inductive and deductive reasoning to create arguments and applied these strategies to his final essay on capital punishment. This course worked reasonably well for Julius although his performance was once again affected by poor attendance because of the class' 8 a.m. hour. However, he passed it and enrolled in English 102 for the spring semester.

Julius also took a health course and a physical education course in weight training. He successfully completed these classes, fulfilling the college's health requirement. He spoke of his rapport with his weight training instructor whom he knew through the soccer team.

As I look back on Julius' progress over the Fall 1998 term, it seems that his participation in the college's soccer program provided him with his strongest connection to the school. I had spoken with his coach over the summer before that season and later attended a practice and a game. I remember that when I introduced myself to Coach Brown and asked about Julius, he replied, "Julius E. Villa! I coach him. He did really well this [Spring 1998] semester. I follow his grades." To illustrate Julius' winning manner, he continued, "I ran into him and a couple of his friends in the mall. He said, 'Hi, coach.' He's an asset to our team. The transition between high school and college is hard, but he played, started some games.... I wish I had 30 Juliuses."

Julius was equally delighted with his participation on the college's team. From the practice and game I attended, as well as from the exchanges I witnessed in the day-to-day of campus life, I learned that Julius and his teammates are friends. I saw many hugs, handshakes, jokes, and other displays of good will. In the heat of competition, the team's members cheered and rooted for each other, on the field and from the sidelines. Julius, the reserved gentleman in the classroom, resonated loud and clear on the soccer field. He even shaved his meticulously styled, thickly abundant head of hair in some sort of bonding ritual before the championship play-off series.

The camaraderie of the team must have helped the members function as a powerful unit because they won the National Junior College Athletic Association

Championship for the second year in a row. As I write this, Julius is awaiting receipt of his championship ring, a lasting symbol of his junior college soccer experience.

Unfortunately, Julius will no longer be eligible to play soccer for the college next fall since N.J.C.A.A. rules allow each participant only two years of active competition.

Julius will surely be missed, and he will miss his team. Recently he told me that he met a new student on campus who was also a strong high school player. Julius told his new acquaintance about the college's soccer program. He said, "I told him to try out for the team. I told him it was wonderful!" Julius' eyes sparkled unreservedly, and he wore a huge smile when he made these remarks. It saddens me to think that he will no longer have this bond with the college.

Despite his mixed feelings about the Fall 1998 semester, Julius enrolled in a full schedule of very demanding courses for Spring 1999. He is currently taking Accounting 107, an introductory accounting class he sees as important to his career plans; Communications 101, an oral communications course; Economics 207, an economics course necessary for his business major; and English and math courses needed to fulfill the college's graduation requirements. We continue to get together from time to time, and he has told me that he will stay at the college until he graduates before transferring to a four year school. He and I look forward to his continued progress.

The Larger Picture

So, then, who is Julius E. Villa? What does he bring, along with his academic vulnerability, to the college community? What are the implications of his membership in the "academic club" (Rose, 1989, p. 141) that is college?

Like Marcus Prince, Julius brings concerns involving commitment to attendance and the punctual completion of assignments to college with him. As stated repeatedly, he also tends to be quiet and reserved in the college classroom. There is no doubt that all these issues thread their way throughout Julius' story. Claxton (1990) and Cross (1971) might use them as evidence to argue that Julius, as a "developmental education" student, is "very pragmatic, with little interest in learning for its own sake." Moreover, they might claim he is "concrete and passive in [his] orientation to learning with few skills in abstract thinking" (Claxton, 1990, p. 85).

If we examine the story Julius and I have told about his life in and out of school, we can hear him say directly that he does have specific, concrete goals for his education. He's in school for reasons that are largely related to his potential career. However, his pragmatic stance toward his schooling and his quiet (but always observant) demeanor do not preclude his interest in the issues raised by the classes and activities he participates in throughout the academy, nor do they indicate that he is a passive student who suffers from an inability to think abstractly.

Rather, by examining Julius' story, we can find evidence that Julius is, in many ways, a strong and active learner, capable of applying the essence of his schooling to his needs. His facility for translating and transferring ideas and concepts to suit his personal objectives, in conjunction with his skillful navigation of the multiple contexts of his life, offer us in the academy models through which I may learn from him just as he learns from his pursuit of higher education. When I consider the questions which have guided this investigation, I find data to support the claim that Julius brings many strengths and capabilities to college.

Julius, like all my student-collaborators, is a first-generation college student. His home culture and the academy's have very little overlap. In much the same way that his grandparents could not help him when he was a youngster, his parents, like many parents of first-generation college students, acknowledge that they cannot help him with his college coursework or campus dealings (Richardson & Fisk, 1992; Lara, 1992; Padron, 1992; Riehl, 1994; Terenzini, et. al., 1996) despite the encouragement they offer him to persist in school. He has mentioned on several occasions that they have told him they trust the decisions he makes in pursuit of his college degree.

Furthermore, the Spanish and "Spanglish" that Julius and his family speak at home are different from the language he uses to communicate at the college. Since "language-minority" students are disproportionately represented in special education classes, this may be at least partially responsible for Julius' label as a "learning disabled" student (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Soto, 1997). In a similar devaluation of his family's culture (Soto, 1997) Julius was encouraged by his early schooling to forgo the language of his home and pursue the English of the academy. Despite these potentially negative influences, Julius takes pride in the multiple language proficiency he brings with him to college. He respects his fluency in Spanish, "Spanglish," and English, as well as his ability to navigate the various contexts in which they are relevant. Zentella (1997) recognizes that Julius' competence in different languages and the environments in which they are used "is an untapped reservoir of national strength" (p. 266), a resource through which all of us who encounter him can learn.

Gordon, Bowman, and McCallister (in progress) also acknowledge the strengths acquired through the exposure to a variety of languages and their corresponding cultures.

They consider it essential for an educated person in modern society "to retain identification with one's cultural heritage while at the same time ... have multiple social and language competencies. Educated people in modern times [must] look at situations and understand them from multiple perspectives" (p. 7). Julius accomplishes this daily, in his home, at his job, among his friends, and at our school. As he mentioned in our conversations about his facile use of various languages, often he is the only person in his college classroom who brings this capability to his class.

Through working, playing, and conversing with Julius, we do more than observe his cultural resources; we change through our experiences with him. His culture has the power to transform us as it "reveals the hidden self and opens paths to other ways of being" (Agar, 1994, p. 20). Thus, we learn from Julius much more than the language or ways of his family's countries of origin; we learn how to navigate "the modern multicultural world" (Agar, p. 20).

As Agar (1994) observes, Julius' rich experiences have, in many ways, already taught him what he is teaching us. He is capable of reckoning with perspectives different from his own. He handles his daily circumstances in a reasonable, concerned, and gentle manner. His unflappable, sensitive demeanor has served him well in his relationships with his different family members from his great-grandmother to his baby sister. He's an asset to his father at work because he knows intuitively how to deal with the people he meets and the situations in which he finds himself. Gordon (1995) recognizes Julius' capabilities when he claims that in the multicultural society of contemporary America, competence involves "understanding in solving problems or explaining relationships... recognizing that the members of various populations live their lives in multiple

contexts.... [in contrast to] those who see and react to the world through monofocal lenses [and] are threatened with marginalization" (p. 361-362).

Julius' family, friends, and teachers appreciate his broad capabilities. His sister, mother, and cousins used similar words to describe him. They see him as "generous," "determined," "loving," and "ambitious." In reflecting on his personality and behavior growing up, his mom said, "Julius, he's an angel." Ms. Manetta, his high school resource room teacher, was equally effusive. I think his English 091 professor's view of Julius best summarizes what the others I interviewed throughout the course of this inquiry expressed. Professor Rothbart commented one day after witnessing Julius and me chatting during a weekly meeting, "Julius is such a good guy and a decent human being. He's so well bred. He's respectful without being overly deferential to us, he's a regular jock with the soccer jocks - he's just good at moving between worlds." Julius fits these descriptors because he always seems to know how to respond to the people in his life, whether they are his family and friends or those he meets through work, school, or the social scene. Moreover, this facility is complemented by Julius' slightly diffident, quietly sincere, demeanor. His manner illustrates capabilities essential to life in contemporary society on and off the college campus.

Julius acknowledges his ability to adapt to various situations. He recognizes his power to comfort a lonely man he meets through his work with his father. He knows that he understands the varying protocols of our college campus from its library to its soccer field. He also demonstrated, during one of our conversations, that he knows, like Tree, that his language, specifically his use of the English language, needs to differ in different situations. "I just know you can't go for a job interview talking slang 'cause they are not

going to hire you. They want somebody that can speak straight and proper." Julius appreciates his knowledge of the "proper speak" of English as well as the Spanish and "Spanglish" discussed in this study. He would agree with Gordon (1995) that he contributes to the college community and to the community at large through his multi-lingual, multi-cultural competencies.

Julius also knows that he has an appealing personality and understands that it works for him in various situations. He said, for example,

Sometimes in school I got away with it, like the teachers, they liked me. They would be in the conference room or somewhere, and I'd be the only kid around, and they would be, "There's Julius; he's in my class. He's a sweetheart!" So they all looked out for me.

At the same time, Julius knows that ultimately he must be responsible for his own performance.

Furthermore, in a world where discontent and anxiety are commonplace, Julius appreciates himself and his life. "I'm happy. I can't complain. I'm healthy." When I asked him how he would want me to represent his strengths in this study, he responded with a question: "Shouldn't everybody believe that they are the best? Everybody is the best in their own way. Everybody is good at something...." When I asked him what he considers himself as good at, Julius replied that he is good at "meeting people, being friendly." His self-assessment matches that of those who know him. His joie-de-vivre works in conjunction with his pleasing demeanor to attract others to him. People appreciate Julius' company, whether they are family members, friends, school or

teammates, teachers, employers, coaches, or lonely customers in need of sympathy.

Julius is a "people" person, and he's lucky enough to know it.

Sternberg (1990) considers this ability to appreciate one's own strengths so clearly evident in Julius as a form of "intelligence" or "giftedness." Sternberg states,

I describe intelligence in terms of capitalizing on strengths and compensating for weaknesses. In other words, gifted individuals, especially practically gifted ones, are almost always people who figure out what it is they are good at and what it is they are not so good at, and then find ways to make the most of their strengths and get around their weaknesses. (p. 298-299)

When we consider Julius' use of his charming manner and gentlemanly demeanor to ally himself with the people he encounters in and out of college, we see evidence of what he has to offer us all. When he combines these gifts with his diligence in completing his research project or his teamwork on the athletic field and in his classroom groups, Julius displays the capabilities of the ideal college student.

Despite these abilities, Julius recognizes that he has problems with attendance and punctual fulfillment of assignments; however, he differs from Marcus Prince and McKenna Green in that he is not particularly troubled by them. While these other collaborators spoke of themselves as "not the best students" in one way or another, Julius assesses himself as sometimes lacking "effort." He spoke on several occasions of "slacking off," but he'd add, "when the time came, I did okay."

I asked him about these issues, and he explained that he actually "thinks" about doing his work ahead of time, but "the habit of waiting to the last minute" is now firmly ingrained in him, so "it's hard" to counter it. On the other hand, he also told me that he's

delighted with the classes he's taking this Spring 1999 semester. He finds his math class, which deals with the principles of logic, interesting, and he feels confident that he is keeping up with the concepts as they are being presented. He noted that his oral communications instructor expressed his admiration of Julius' multi-language proficiency early in the term. He is proud that he is the only student in this class of 25 who is fluent in more than one language. He appreciates his teacher's recognition of this and hopes to share his languages with the class. He said, "My instructor and I connected. I could tell it right away." He also assured me that now that he has a car, he has a convenient means of getting to school, so he is confident his attendance will improve.

Despite his acknowledged academic issues, an assessment that Julius made of himself recently seems salient in light of information that will be presented in Chapter 6. He asserted proudly, "I'm still here, aren't I?" in response to my queries about his progress. Yes, Julius E. Villa is still a member of our college community. He is using his strengths and capabilities to enhance his learning and acquire the skills and information he needs to fulfill his goals. In the process, he is sharing his views, ideas, knowledge, and competencies with all of us in the college community. Issues or not, we are lucky to have him.

CHAPTER 5

"I am not a statistic:"

The Story of Destiny Jordan

Entree

Destiny Jordan was, like McKenna Green, a student in my 8 a.m. section of Reading 090 during the Fall 1997 semester. While McKenna was present in our room before I arrived on the first day of class, Destiny appeared a few minutes late. I remember her entrance well because after she assumed a seat, I noticed that she was eyeing me somewhat quizzically. I don't know what she was thinking, but I do know that when I learned her name, I asked her if she was related to Renardo Jordan, a student I had enjoyed working with throughout his three years at the college. She looked at me dubiously, shook her head, and uttered merely, "no."

I was a bit disappointed by our exchange, not simply because it failed to yield news of my former student, but also because Destiny seemed to wonder why I had asked her the question in the first place. Although I usually remind students who arrive late of the need for punctuality right from the first day of class, I decided to forgo such a remark and continue my introduction to the course rather than cause myself or my new student any further discomfort. Destiny spent the remainder of the class staring at me through her big brown eyes, and I remember glancing at her from time to time in a futile effort to figure her out.

While my acquaintance with Destiny began on uncertain footing, one of the many rewarding aspects of Reading Workshop is that its format quickly helps to alleviate any tentativeness on the part of students or teacher. After I had explained the policies and

procedures of our course, we selected books and began the reading around which Workshop is structured. Within days we started talking about our books and the issues they raised, and Destiny and I started to feel comfortable with each other. She began her first literary letter to me on a personal note even though she was unsure of what to call me and addressed it, "To:" followed by a blank rather than a name. I filled in "Chris (That's me!)" and continued reading, "How are you doing? Fine, I hope. I'm doing great. I'm reading my book. This book is so interesting." As she wrote, she interrupted her discussion of Lois Duncan's The Third Eye to assure me that the book was growing more suspenseful and so would her next letter. "This is just the beginning," she reported. "I'm just surprised that [the book] started getting so good already."

Thanks to McKenna Green and the other students in our section of the course, conversation flowed quite freely among us. My notes reflect that Destiny consistently read, wrote, and participated in our class discussions, offering informal critiques of her books as well as her views on the issues raised by our reading. She seemed to build confidence in herself as a reader by completing a few brief mysteries; then she ventured into books dealing with larger issues including child abuse, historical events, and contemporary life styles.

From time to time, Destiny brought matters of personal concern into our discussions. She spoke of her son Shamel, who was a toddler at the time, offered anecdotes of life in her multi-generational family, and explained that she was an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) who worked in a large county hospital located just a mile or two from the college. When our conversation turned to issues involving physical or mental health, Destiny often recounted relevant experiences relating to her work. One

day she told us that she had just come from her shift at the hospital where, for the first time, she had participated in telling a patient the results of a positive HIV test. She explained that she sat with the patient for a long time afterward, holding her and elaborating on the latest advances in treatment, trying to comfort the woman's fears. We were moved by Destiny's account, and I could not help but notice the grace and tenderness with which she seemed to handle her professional responsibility. This prompted me to ask Destiny her age, thinking that she must have looked younger than she was. I was a bit startled when I learned that she was just nineteen years old.

Throughout the course of our semester, her perspective contributed to our class' conversation and broadened our ideas. Most of the students, although just a year younger than Destiny, came directly from high school. Only one other was a parent; no one else worked in the medical field. While she was sometimes tired, having come to class directly from working from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., Destiny was consistently an asset to our group.

She eventually acknowledged the skepticism with which she had enrolled in our class, as well as her change of heart during its first few weeks. She let us know how pleased she was with herself and our group. In her final letter of the term, she echoed the sentiments of many Reading Workshop participants, "This was one of my best experiences in my whole life in school. I was able to express my feelings on paper and in discussion. I also got to tap into the world of reading, and I'm still tapping." She offered a postscript, "Oh, and Shamel got a whole collection of children's books for Christmas."

At the semester's conclusion, I was happy to inform Destiny that her grades and her performance on the D.R.P. exit exam earned her placement in Reading 101, a three

credit course in textbook reading strategies, study skills, and research techniques. Her progress was also strong in terms of English and math. She bypassed the non-credit English course which usually succeeds the English 091 class she had just completed and placed directly into English 101, a three credit composition course. She skipped Math 001 and placed into Math 002, the last course in the college preparatory math sequence. She earned an A in the three credit office technology course she also took that semester.

Destiny and I met for our end-of-the-semester conference before she had completed the registration process. At the end of our conversation about our course, I asked Destiny if she would be interested in collaborating with me in this inquiry. Unlike McKenna, who had been curious about my proposed investigation throughout the term, Destiny hadn't really given me an indication of what she thought of my study. She showed little reaction to my request, so I quickly asked her not to feel compelled to help me. I explained that I understood how busy she was and that she would need to spend a great deal of time with me that she most likely wouldn't have. When she left my office, I grew increasingly uncomfortable with my request, regretting that I had put a student "on the spot" by my concern for my study.

A few days later, Destiny reappeared at my office door, accompanied by Shamel and McKenna Green. She explained that she had just come from a meeting with her seminar instructor in order to register for courses for the Spring 1998 term. She looked forward to moving toward her Associate of Science degree in Nursing (and a license as a Registered Nurse). We were just sort of hanging around, chatting, and playing with Shamel, when I remarked that I was sorry I had imposed on her by asking her to work with me. Destiny shot me the same quizzical glance she offered on the first day of class.

"I already told you I would do it," she said, shaking her head. I hadn't realized that at all. I asked her if she had talked with her family about my proposal, and she replied that she had, and her mom had "already told all her friends at work" about Destiny's collaboration with me. We made a date for after the New Year, and McKenna, Destiny, and I talked about all three of us getting together as part of our investigation.

Getting Together with Destiny

Destiny and I began our inquiry on a Saturday morning in January over breakfast at my home. Shamel accompanied his mom. For over two hours, we sat at my dinette table and talked about Destiny's life while Shamel played contentedly with assorted kitchen gadgets I found for him.

Our discussion turned eventually to family, and Destiny elaborated on many of the descriptions of her loved ones that she had begun during our classroom discussions. From this and many subsequent conversations, I learned about Destiny and her family from a variety of perspectives. Although Destiny and I met regularly for brief periods of time during the course of our school days, we conducted our planned conversations less frequently than my other collaborators and I did, quite simply because of the constraints on her time. However, we spent extended periods of time together when we did get to meet, approximately twice a month during the spring term and every third week for most of the eleven months that have intervened between then and now as I write this. Our meetings usually centered around a meal and lasted for at least two hours. Often we would chuckle as we saw the 60 minute tapes on which I recorded our conversations starting to stack up on our dining table. We used our ramblings about our daily lives as springboards to our discussions of the issues raised by this inquiry's guiding questions.

As is the case with each of my student-collaborators, we're still getting together. When we can, we have lunch or dinner or shop at the local mall. We've also visited Ms. Jordan, Destiny's mom, at her office in our county courthouse, and we spent a day and evening with Ms. Jordan and Ms. James, Destiny's grandmother, when we attended a lecture and prayer service offered by a popular evangelist at a large religious meeting hall in a neighboring county. I spoke with Dee, Destiny's brother, and Terrell, her boyfriend, and met on occasion with McKenna and Destiny. I've also conversed with several of Destiny's professors at the college and visited Destiny's classes and her job site. Through these different experiences, I've learned about Destiny's life as it is today and as it was growing up in suburban communities near the college.

The Jordans

Destiny Jordan was born on March 10, 1978 to a young couple. Ms. Jordan was still a teenager, and Mr. Jordan was in his early twenties. When she was a child, Destiny lived with her parents and her younger brother in Mr. Jordan's family home, which is within commuting distance of the college. When she was in high school, her parents separated, and Ms. Jordan moved with her two children to an apartment in a community neighboring the college. Later the Jordans reconciled, and Mr. Jordan moved into the apartment with his family.

Several family members, spanning three generations, live in the same or nearby communities. They keep up with each other's business and look out for one another. Destiny's grandmother, a seemingly tireless woman in her early sixties, is an integral part of Destiny's life. Ms. James actually cared for Shamel for most of every day for the first

year Destiny was in college so that Destiny could attend school and work to earn a living for herself and her son.

Destiny also receives support from her parents and her brother, Dee, in raising Shamel. If her responsibilities compel her to be away from her son, whether for an hour or the better part of a day, Destiny can count on her family to help care for him. She's told me, and I've observed myself that her family's cohesiveness is critical to her survival in her multiple roles as mother, daughter, and sister, as well as, relative, girlfriend, student, and worker.

This unity did not exist, however, from the outset of Destiny's decision to become a mother. She informed me that at first her family was upset, angered, and worried by her pregnancy. As Destiny explained, before she became pregnant, her social life pretty much centered on hanging around with her friends. Her behavior concerned her mom because the family lived in a dangerous area of their town.

My neighborhood was bad. Three people on my block got shot.... My mom was scared of that. I knew everybody, and she hated that I knew everybody. The guys were older like 18, 19, and my house had a porch, and it was across from a park, and she hated that. A lot of people sold drugs, and there I was in the middle, and she thought someone would come by and shoot.

Even after the family moved, Destiny remained close with friends from her former community. She explained that she met Terrell, Shamel's father, through these friends. "I started going with Terrell," she said. "I started going out to different parties and to clubs... and my mom would wait up for me." Often Destiny stayed out after the curfew her mom had set for her, and, in general, worried Ms. Jordan by her behavior.

When Destiny became pregnant, Ms. Jordan realized it without being told. Her immediate reaction was one of great anger over what she considered Destiny's poor judgment. For the first months of her pregnancy, Destiny and Ms. Jordan were estranged from each other. It was a difficult period for both of them.

According to Destiny, she was sustained by her father's support during this time. Eventually, when she was six months pregnant, Destiny and her mother talked out their concerns. Destiny explained that when she and Ms. Jordan finally spoke, they conversed for over three hours, sharing their thoughts and feelings, worries and hopes for Destiny and her baby's well-being. Destiny described the conversation: "I let my mother know where my mind was, that I wasn't -- I'm not a statistic. After that... my whole life changed. Everything was different because of Shamel. Everything centered around my child. This door started opening, and that door started opening."

Ms. Jordan and Ms. James corroborated Destiny's story of their reaction to her pregnancy and Shamel's birth. Ms. Jordan explained that she responded to Destiny's situation in much the way her mom addressed issues she had faced growing up.

I felt, okay, go ahead, you hit the bottom now; before you drown, I'll pull you out. [My mother] made me grow and deal with what I had to deal with before she stepped in and helped me, so I'd know I couldn't depend on [anyone but myself]. A lot of decisions and a lot of choices that I made, I had to deal with, and that's the way I want it for Destiny because, God forbid, something happens to me, Destiny will have to do it on her own, so it's better that she knows how to do it while I'm here.

She explained her fears, "You know, Destiny is the kind of person that when she conquers something, she gets bored with it, and she goes on. So I was worried about Shamel because Shamel is forever." Yet, Ms. Jordan smiled broadly as she expressed her relief and pride in Destiny's ability to meet her parental responsibility. She observed that in contrast to her concerns for her daughter, Destiny takes great pleasure in raising her son.

Ms. Jordan and Ms. James, who have consistently helped Destiny to care for Shamel, are deliberate in their efforts to ensure that Destiny is, nevertheless, responsible for him. Ms. Jordan noted, "I don't go out and buy [disposable diapers] for Shamel when Shamel is out; that's something Destiny's got to do." After mentioning other daily tasks Destiny fulfills in child rearing, Ms. Jordan continued, "I wasn't for this thing.... It's not easy for a teenager to try to go to school and have a baby, and it's not fair for me to have to be there. [Destiny] knows [she] has to be there.... [She] has to... be determined... because if something happens, there's Shamel, and [she's] going to have to make an example for him."

I witnessed the meaning of Ms. Jordan's words when the four generations of family members and I attended a religious service and inspirational lecture. Ms. James, Ms. Jordan, Destiny, and Shamel enjoyed each other's company as the women talked with each other and me, and we all chatted with Shamel. It took us almost an hour by car to reach the large meeting hall where the service was conducted, and the service itself lasted more than three hours. Eventually Shamel, who had sat contentedly for quite a while on alternating laps, became restless. Destiny matter-of-factly carried him to the lobby of the auditorium and allowed him to walk about that open space while she followed after him,

talking with him about the prayer service, the other children in the lobby, and their plans for the following day. Ms. Jordan and Ms. James, both of whom had readily taken turns holding Shamel inside the auditorium, participated in the entire service, exiting only at its conclusion. Each woman's affection for Shamel was evident; Destiny's ultimate responsibility for her son was equally so.

Destiny understands her family's position and is thankful for the support and guidance she receives. She is particularly grateful to her mom, whose advice and help she knows she can always count on, and whose approval she seeks, as well as whose company she thoroughly enjoys. In every conversation we had throughout our inquiry, Destiny mentioned her mother's views of this or that situation. Whether we were talking about a new hairstyle, Shamel's latest expression, or a relative in trouble, Destiny would tell me what she had said to her mom and how her mom had responded to the topic under discussion. "That's what it always comes down to," she said one day, "My mother. When I need someone I can depend on, she's the one who's always there."

Destiny is also aware that Shamel's well-being is her first priority. I've frequently observed the insights and patience with which this young mother cares for her son. Her relationship with Shamel is grounded in their mutual affection. He makes her laugh, and she makes him happy. In the eighteen months that I have known them, I have watched Destiny teach her son to speak, seen for myself the firm, but always gentle, tongue-in-cheek approach she used to wean him from his bottle and train him to use the toilet, and heard tell of the progress he makes according to Destiny's reports of their visits to his pediatrician and his nursery school.

I was particularly touched when Destiny mentioned one day that she would be going the following evening to her first parent-teacher conference. Her anticipation reminded me of my early days of motherhood. She explained that she was anxious to hear what Shamel's teacher would have to say about him because from time to time, he cried when she, her mother, or grandmother dropped him off at school.

Actually, Destiny had mixed feelings about enrolling him in the school in the first place. She explained that she thought he was quite young, at two and a half, to go to school, but she worried that he was becoming too much for her grandmother to care for. Since Destiny knows that by attending college, she is building a life for herself and her son, and that by working she can meet their expenses, she made the decision to provide the best possible daycare for Shamel. She found this in a pre-school, daycare center in her family's community. Destiny is pleased with the opportunities Shamel is offered in school, but she also limits the time he spends there. She told me that she feels he benefits from the stimulation of the busy school environment but also needs the individual attention he receives from his family.

As I write this, Shamel continues to thrive, and Destiny takes great pride in her son. She reiterated recently a remark I had heard her make several times earlier. "Shamel's not like a normal two and a half year old. He knows how to" She then listed his precocious accomplishments and conversations. I laugh when Destiny reports this progress. Her evaluations of her child echo my views of her and the maturity she exhibits in facilitating her son's growth.

Destiny's sense of responsibility extends beyond her son to the other members of her family. She tells me of aunts and cousins with whom she is closely involved. She

also plays a major role in her teenage brother's daily life. She speaks of him frequently, expressing pride in his accomplishments and concern over his foibles. She mentioned that Dee is a talented gymnast, who competes throughout the area. As Destiny sees him growing older and quite social, she worries that he will become more interested in his social life than his athletics. She explained that she remembers being Dee's age and wants to see him focus more on his responsibilities and less on his peer group than she did.

During the course of our inquiry, Dee was a student at the high school from which Destiny graduated. Destiny followed his progress closely, taking pride in his strengths, particularly in math, and voicing concern about his student qualities. She sounded like a parent when she assessed him rather severely, "His math is like 100%. Everything else ...[could be stronger]. My brother is just into his friends right now." It is Destiny's belief that Dee needs to build good habits in terms of his responsibilities in his home and in school. Despite her sisterly disapproval of what she sees as her younger brother's carelessness, she expressed her sympathy for Dee, observing that her family's apartment is small, and her brother needed more space and privacy than he had.

Destiny responded to her brother's situation by moving with Shamel from her family's apartment into her grandparents' home early in 1999. She explained that this afforded Dee his own bedroom and a sense of independence from his parents. She feels sure this will also promote his progress in school.

As I write this, the Jordans are completing the paperwork involved in purchasing the James' home, and Destiny's grandparents are moving to a house they recently bought in the community where Ms. James grew up in North Carolina. The Jordans have long

anticipated this move. While they look forward to the increased space offered by their new residence, they have mixed feelings about finalizing their deal. They will miss their daily contact with the senior generation of their family. Destiny will miss her grandmother's company and her help in caring for Shamel. She told me, however, that she thinks this move will afford her grandmother the restful life she deserves.

Destiny and Her Work

Work and the work ethic are important, not only to Destiny's grandmother, but to her parents and herself as well. Destiny's dad works for a record distribution company, and her mom is employed through the Civil Service Administration in the county court system. She also works in the evening as a sales clerk. Throughout the course of our inquiry, Destiny has worked anywhere from 32 to 40 or more hours a week, while caring for Shamel and attempting a full-time schedule at the college.

When I first met Destiny, she was employed at a large medical center, located near our college, as a Licensed Practical Nurse. She worked 40 hours a week or more for over a year after graduating from the state's Board of Cooperative Educational Services program in this field and passing the state's licensing exam. Destiny loved her work at the hospital; it enabled her to apply the skills and information she learned through her participation in the training program, and it broadened her knowledge of her field. She spoke of various incidents and her responses to them. She remembered, for example, feeling frightened when an elderly patient's heart monitor indicated that her heart had stopped beating. She resuscitated her four times within an hour until the woman's family decided to sign a "Do Not Resuscitate" order.

She spoke of writing detailed nurse's notes, delineating her experiences with each patient during the course of her shift. She explained that these notes are essential in ensuring the consistent quality of a patient's care and that she labored over them after each work day for up to two hours at a time. She expressed her admiration for the nurse's notes written by the Registered Nurses, observing that their notes were more detailed than hers and filled with clinical terms and abbreviations. She told me repeatedly that she looks forward to becoming a Registered Nurse and having the expertise she witnessed among the RNs at the hospital.

Despite her enthusiasm for this work, she decided to take a leave from the hospital after her first semester as a college student. She explained, "The last day of school [of the Fall 1997 semester], I talked to the head nurse, and I showed her my schedule [for the spring term]." After discussing the rigors of her coursework with her supervisor, Destiny told her, "I'm going to take a leave of absence because I don't know how [challenging] these classes are going to be." She had grown very tired from juggling her work, which was inflexible in its minimum 40 hour work week, and school obligations with caring for Shamel. Her son's well-being was, and continues to be, her most important responsibility. She did not want to jeopardize her progress as a college student, so she decided, after talking it over with her mother, to leave the health care field temporarily and secure another, more flexible position, one that she could view as a job rather than a profession.

Although Destiny misses her work at the hospital, she feels she made the right decision in taking her job at a branch of a national computer store. While she does not see this work as being as demanding as that of an LPN, she acknowledges it presents its

own challenges. I've visited her on occasion at the store and witnessed her skillful, patient dealings with very demanding, often confused, customers and a variety of colleagues. Since Destiny usually works in the Customer Service department, she regularly deals with disgruntled customers. One day I watched her for over two hours as she addressed the concerns of a continuous line of people. She was courteous and efficient with all of them. If technical assistance was required, she secured the appropriate technician and waited on the next customer while the problem was being addressed rather than hold up her line. She juggled the needs of several people at once, accommodating each. Although customers returning merchandise are sometimes dissatisfied and even angry, Destiny maintained her pleasant manner throughout her transactions with them.

Destiny works well with her supervisors and has become friends with several of her coworkers, most of whom are also college students. This is different from her situation at the medical center, where Destiny was by far the youngest person on her floor. As I write this, Destiny has been employed at the computer store for well over a year; her performance is reviewed regularly, and she has earned several raises as a result. It strikes me that Destiny's experience as a nurse serves her well in her current position. She ably fulfills the requirements of her job, and she is consistently professional in her dealings with her customers.

Destiny's Education

One aspect of her job Destiny monitors closely is her schedule. She has had to address this issue regularly over the course of her employment at the computer store because her supervisors often ask her to work extra hours during the course of a week.

She struggles to avoid doing this since she does not want to spend any more time than necessary away from Shamel and because extending her hours drains the time and energy she has left for her college coursework. She is constantly striving to balance her responsibilities. Since her first priority is Shamel, she is forced to juggle her various other obligations. This pressure, combined with the academic issues Destiny brought with her to college, present her with a relentless challenge.

The early years.

Destiny's mom explained that Destiny's first experience with formal education was through the pre-kindergarten program at the parochial elementary school she attended from then through her graduation after eighth grade. Ms. Jordan described Destiny's attitude and behavior in the early years of her schooling:

When she was in nursery school, I got called up to the school because the teacher had no control over the class. All the kids were coming to Destiny instead of the teacher.... They would go to Destiny to tie their shoes, button their clothes, or let Destiny know that they had to go to the bathroom. She would let the kids know it was time to rest or go to the bathroom.... I had to go in and talk to Destiny and let her know that she's not the teacher, she's a student. This went all the way through [Destiny's elementary school experience]. My son is four years younger than Destiny, and she registered him for school. When I went up there to register him for pre-k, they said, "We have all this information." I said, "How did you get it?" Destiny had already set it up. She has always been like that; it's just her personality.

Ms. Jordan told me that Destiny attended the parochial school until the seventh grade when she wanted to join her friends at the public junior high. The Jordans agreed but almost immediately withdrew her from their local school and enrolled her once again at the parochial school. Ms. Jordan said Destiny behaved poorly in the public school, violating rules and refusing to attend to her school work. Her last two years of parochial school were marked as well by her repeatedly rebellious behavior. By her mother's report, she provoked arguments in and out of class and caused her parents and her teachers to become increasingly frustrated over her difficult demeanor.

Yet, Ms. Jordan and Destiny agreed in their observation that the school's officials viewed her as a leader among her classmates. Mother and daughter stated that the teachers and administrators who dealt with Destiny during her last two years of elementary school assured them that if Destiny would channel her leadership potential, she would, in Ms. Jordan's words, "go where she wanted to in life." Initially her destination was her local public high school, which Destiny attended despite her parents' reservations.

High school and the Board of Cooperative Educational Services.

Destiny attended the local public high school for her freshman and half of her sophomore year. When her parents separated, she moved with her mother and brother to a nearby community. She transferred for the second semester of her sophomore year to that town's public school. Since she maintained her friendships with her former classmates, she often spent weekends with her father, who remained in his family's prior home. Her academic and social lives became increasingly chaotic. From what Destiny says about her life in high school, it seems that although she already knew people in her

second school when she started attending it, she was never really sure where she was or wanted to be. Her mother said that "Destiny was lost" during that period of her life. Her academic performance continued down the path it had begun during her tumultuous last years of elementary school, and she focused on her social rather than school life. She did not form ties with either of the high schools she attended, and when I asked her if there was anyone from either school she would like me to contact as part of our investigation, she was quite adamant that there was not.

Despite this, she expressed an interest in nursing and enrolled, through her second high school, in the state's Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) program in nursing, preparing for the state's licensing exam and a career as a Licensed Practical Nurse. She spent part of her time in school at her local building and the remainder at the BOCES site in a neighboring community or at one of the hospitals affiliated with the program. Destiny became increasingly enthusiastic about her nursing studies. She took courses in biology, anatomy and physiology, chemistry, and psychology, among others, as part of this program. Passing grades varied from course to course, but the minimum grade was always at least 75% and sometimes much higher in areas dealing with human vital organs and systems.

The state regulates and monitors the BOCES program to ensure that patients cared for by its graduates are in capable hands. Destiny told me that she understood the necessity for the rigorous course of study and its grading policies and worked hard to meet these challenges. When she became pregnant in the October of her senior year, she added these issues to the ones she already faced. Nevertheless, she graduated from high school in June 1996, two weeks after Shamel's birth. At that point, she transferred from

the high school to the adult nursing program, passing her licensing exam and graduating in August of the same year.

Although Destiny had little to say about her high schools or their teachers, she spoke animatedly and often about her nursing studies. She talked, for example, about the awe she felt the first time she participated in helping a mother give birth and about the opportunity she earned to witness a doctor perform surgery to relieve swelling in a patient's brain. She explained that she was selected to be present in the operating room for the procedure based on her score of 92% on a test about the different spheres of the brain and their functions. She noted on several occasions her interest in the brain and in the study of psychology as it applies to neuro-physiology.

Dealing with college.

Destiny's enthusiasm for the medical field, combined with her desire to make a comfortable living for herself and Shamel, prompted her to enroll at the community college to further her career. Her family, particularly her mom, strongly encouraged this decision, offering her assistance in caring for Shamel to enable Destiny to pursue her dream of becoming a Registered Nurse. Despite her successful completion of her earlier nursing program, Destiny was not surprised at the results of the college's placement test. She realized that she placed into the college's Basic Education Program because several aspects her former school performance were weak. At the same time, she was anxious to expedite her remedial coursework and move into her nursing studies.

Destiny's first semester in college was quite fruitful in several ways. Even though she worked long hours at the medical center, she was consistently present and attentive in our reading class. After she became comfortable, she contributed during every class

meeting to our conversation and often questioned one or another of our views on the wide range of topics we discussed. As mentioned earlier, she fulfilled the course requirements well and excelled on the D.R.P. exit exam, so she was able to progress directly into Reading 101, a three credit course. Her performance in her English and math classes also expedited her progression into higher level coursework.

Destiny's academic progress was accompanied by the firm friendship she formed with McKenna Green during the course of their semester together in my class. Although Destiny's overloaded schedule rarely permitted her an opportunity to get together beyond the college campus, she and McKenna extended themselves to each other during the school day. At the end of the term, when Destiny and McKenna learned that they were both participating in my study, they asked to meet together from time to time. We've done so, and I've been able to witness the respect and affection my two collaborators offer each other.

As we began our investigation in January 1998, Destiny was enrolled, as a full-time, matriculating student, in English 101, Reading 101, Math 002, and General Psychology, 203, a course that fulfilled a requirement of the college's nursing major. In much the same way that I did with each of my student-collaborators, I followed Destiny's progress closely that semester. By her own choice, her school day began two mornings each week at 6:30 a.m. and on the three other days at 8 a.m. She had no breaks in her schedule, so she finished one morning at 7:45 a.m. and on the other four at 10:45. She worked at the computer store four of those five days, usually until 6 p.m. or later and from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. or later on Saturdays.

Needless to say, Destiny was challenged by the relentless demands on her time and attention. She also worried about Shamel's well-being. Although he was cared for by his great-grandparents, his grandparents, his father, and his uncle, Destiny wanted to spend more time with him. Her divided energies exhausted her, prompting her to stop attending her reading class about four weeks before the end of the term. Up until that point, she had maintained a B, if not a B+ average, in the class, but she became overwhelmed by the end-of-the-semester obligations of each of her classes and simply let the reading class go.

I didn't learn of this until after the end of the semester when Destiny explained what she had done. After securing her permission, I spoke with her reading professor who seemed puzzled by her student's disappearance from class. Dr. Simpkins explained that if Destiny had talked with her before she stopped attending, she would have considered Destiny's performance throughout the semester as reason to offer her student an "Incomplete" in the course. This would have allowed her to fulfill the course's outstanding assignments at a later date rather than fail the class.

Destiny and I talked about the implications of her failing grade in Reading 101 in terms of her academic status at the college and, more importantly, in the context of her admission into its nursing major, which requires a 2.75 grade point average in the courses leading up to its program. Despite my outspoken concern, Destiny displayed little emotion as she informed me that she would take the course over to improve her grade. As I write this, two semesters later, she is once again enrolled in this course, and she seems satisfied with her progress thus far.

Destiny fared much better in her other courses, successfully completing all of them. She was relieved when she realized she had passed math because she had been uncertain of her performance in that class. She liked her English and psychology classes, despite the early morning hour at which her English class was held. Because she spoke enthusiastically of these classes, I visited both of them. I had actually wanted to attend her reading and math classes as well, but their times overlapped with my teaching schedule.

Destiny and I went out for breakfast after my visit to her English class, which was her only course on Thursdays that semester. Over pancakes, we talked about the lecture we had just heard on the heroic figure in Ernest Hemingway's writing and about the course itself. Professor Yarrow, a seasoned member of the English department who is also an attorney with an active practice, presented an animated analysis of Hemingway's heroes. He gave Destiny and me much to think about in his application of his ideas to the figure of Santiago, the old fisherman, in The Old Man and the Sea.

We tossed our thoughts about the Hemingway hero at each other as we ate, and then Destiny mentioned that she had to write a paper on this topic as evidenced in this novella. When she expressed hesitancy about how to go about this, I asked her to continue her thinking aloud on the subject, and I would record her thoughts for her to use as a reference. I wrote on the back of the paper placemats upon which our breakfasts had been served. Destiny spoke freely about the characters in this classic American story, relating her observations and ideas to her grandfather's personality and attitudes. At one point, I commented that she was accomplishing more than I had originally hoped to gain from this exercise; she was actually dictating a critical analysis of The Old Man and the

Sea to me. Shooting me the deadpan look I readily recognized by this time, she remarked, "I'm just writing a literary letter." At the risk of sounding dramatic, this comment was an epiphany for me. I realized that I could adjust the language and presentation of my course to facilitate my students' growth as readers and writers in ways I had not considered before; I could offer them insights and strategies about the transfer of their learning experiences in our course to other academic circumstances. Both Destiny and I were pleased with our breakfast meeting that day.

I also enjoyed my visit to Destiny's psychology class, during which the professor began a unit on the statistical concepts the students needed to know in order to interpret the data they would work with later in the course. Destiny was attentive during the lecture and asked a question about one of the concepts presented. After that class, Destiny walked me across the college's campus to my office. However, her conversation centered, not on the class we had just attended, but on her work schedule and on the exhaustion both she and her grandmother were feeling from it. Just as she had at our breakfast meeting, she expressed her concern about leaving Shamel for too much time each day. Although she said her mother tried to reassure her, the notes I recorded about our discussion indicate that she was worried about dealing with her increasing academic obligations along with her other responsibilities.

Despite the rigors of her Spring 1998 schedule, Destiny rarely asked me for help with her coursework. When we got together, we went to lunch or dinner, shopped locally, or met at my home for conversation. In my view, Destiny's life was too busy; I wanted to spend our time together facilitating her schoolwork, but she really seemed to prefer to talk about our daily lives and the answers to the questions which initiated our

study. Since I agreed to respect her wishes about my role in her life as a condition of our work together, I fought, and continue to fight, my "teacherly" instincts as much as I can.

At the same time, I have observed closely the particular course of my study with Destiny. While all my student-collaborators have generously shared their lives, their loved ones, their stories, and their insights with me, Destiny has, from our study's outset, been very specific in guiding our investigation. She seems to intuit what I need to know and do and whom I need to meet to tell her story. I remember vividly an invitation she extended at one of our first meetings. "You'll need to meet my mother soon; she wants to meet you too. Let's visit her at work." I would never have imposed on Ms. Jordan's professional time, but I was so pleased to be invited that we went that day to her office. There I got to meet Destiny's mom and witness the affectionate give and take between mother and daughter as well as Ms. Jordan's pride in Destiny.

More than a year later as I write this, Destiny stops by my classroom once a week to offer me news about Shamel, her family, her job, or Terrell, her boyfriend. She seeks me out to keep me up-to-date and remind me of avenues we still need to explore in our study. Actually, all my collaborators make sure we keep in touch: Julius and McKenna come by if a couple of weeks pass without us speaking, and I see Tree everyday since he now works for our department. However, Destiny regularly offers me a systematic account of the latest issues in her life. She has even called me from time to time between our meetings, just to "talk."

My enthusiasm for the progress Destiny and I have made in our inquiry is tempered by my continuing concern for her academic issues. Although she acknowledges the onus her daily responsibilities place upon her life in school, she

enrolled in an even more challenging course of study for the Fall 1998 term than the one she faced the previous spring. Once again she created a tight schedule, with no breaks between classes, in order to minimize her time on campus and allow her to work at least 32 hours each week. Destiny struggled throughout the term and eventually withdrew from the four credit anatomy and physiology course and the three credit math course she took to fulfill requirements of her potential nursing major. She successfully completed her health class and her child development class, both of which fulfill other requirements in her nursing course of study.

As I write this, we are in the midst of the Spring 1999 semester. Destiny is once again taking a full schedule of courses; however, her schedule is now a bit less constrained by time. It extends until early or mid-afternoon four out of the five days she is in school each week, and on some days she has breaks between her classes. Consequently, she has reduced her work schedule to about 25 hours each week. Although she is financially burdened by this decision, she and I hope that ultimately she will prosper because of this.

Destiny's Goals and Beliefs; Relationships and Dreams

Despite the responsibilities she faces in and out of school, Destiny remains steadfast in her pursuit of higher education. She wants to learn the intricacies of health care and apply her knowledge through her work with patients in a hospital. She says, "I love [nursing]. It draws me. It changes all the time," reminding me of her mom's view that Destiny needs a constant challenge. Destiny has told me over the course of this inquiry that she wants the knowledge, opportunity, authority, prestige, and financial remuneration afforded by the license to be a Registered Nurse. Driving all these goals is

Destiny's desire to make a comfortable life for Shamel and herself and to make her family, particularly her mother, proud of her.

As I see it, Destiny rallies the strength and motivation to persist in college, when it would, in many ways, be easier to return to her position as a Licensed Practical Nurse, not only from her family, but also from her strong religious beliefs. She's often told me that God is her best friend and that prayer inspires, nurtures, and comforts her according to her needs. She's spoken about her relationship with God on several occasions throughout our inquiry, and I got to witness the fervor of her faith when I participated with her and her family in the inspirational prayer service and sermon.

Destiny explained that her friendship with God grew particularly intense after she became pregnant with Shamel.

I was real down when I got pregnant with my son. It was a real burden on my heart ... and I put up a front in front of my friends. They thought I was happy.... They thought it was so cool. But... God is the only one that I really had. I had Terrell... but not the contact [with my mother] that I needed. God was the only contact that I had.... I would pray and pray and pray. [God] would talk to me about a lot of things. He would show me where I was going, how things were going to turn out.

Destiny stated on several occasions that through her pregnancy and Shamel's birth, as well as through many other situations in her life, her faith in God has helped her to be strong. I was touched by Destiny's expression of her relationship with her God. She is deeply committed to her convictions even as she is nurtured by them.

She takes this faith beyond herself and uses it to support her loved ones. She explained, for example, helping her mother direct her prayers when her mother was frustrated over a desire for a promotion at work. Destiny told her mom, who was unsure of how to pray about this issue, "You pray for something, have faith in it, and just go on.... You're either with God on it, or you're not. And [my mother] looked at me, and she just burst out crying. 'Oh, Destiny,' [she said], ' You just say all the right things.'" Destiny has taught Shamel to pray and was pleased to be able to tell me that he now prays on his own to ask God to bless the new friends he's making in school.

Destiny is also pleased with her ongoing relationship with Terrell, Shamel's father. He is 24 years old and has been working long hours each week since he left high school when he was 17. During the day, he manufactures and installs residential swimming pools and at night, he holds one or another part-time job. While Destiny worries about differences that may come between them as she progresses through college, she recognizes the importance of Terrell's constant presence in their son's life and is proud of the affection father and son share. Destiny and Terrell have been together for more than four years. From time to time, they quarrel, or at least Destiny feels they do, but they seem to sincerely care for each other and are firmly united in their love and responsibility for raising their son.

While Destiny acknowledges that for now she and Shamel must live with her family in order for her to stay in school, she looks forward to establishing her own home. She sometimes says that she would like to leave the area and move down South, perhaps to Virginia or North Carolina where members of her extended family live. She feels the cost of living will be cheaper, and the quality of life will be better. When I ask her if she

sees Terrell as part of her future family and home, she seems unsure of how to answer. She did say that she knows she is strong enough to make a home for her son and herself with, or without, the child's father. At the same time, she has expressed her respect and fondness for Terrell repeatedly throughout our investigation as well as her appreciation of his relationship with their son. I'm rooting for Destiny; she knows what she wants, and she knows what she needs to do to get it. We are both aware that her continued pursuit of college to attain an Associate of Science in Nursing degree and the Registered Nurse license that accompanies it is an integral part of this plan as it now stands.

The Larger Picture

There is evidence throughout Destiny's academic history of issues that impinge upon her progress. She comes to college from a troubled educational experience. As she and Ms. Jordan have stated, she began her pursuit of higher learning disenfranchised from the academy since some time during her elementary school years. Yet, she has been successful in achieving a major professional goal: a license as a Practical Nurse.

Along with her nursing license, at 20 years of age, Destiny Jordan brings to college accomplishments that would be remarkable in someone well beyond her years. She is a capable, loving mother; a devoted, responsive daughter, sister, granddaughter, relative, and friend; and she is an efficient, creative, and sensitive nurse and customer services representative. She is also, when she feels she needs to be, a leader in each of her relationships with her family members, coworkers, or friends. In this capacity, she makes decisions for herself and the people she loves; then she acts upon them.

When I analyze Destiny's story in terms of the strengths and capabilities that her multiple roles reveal, even as this story acknowledges her academic vulnerabilities, I see

data to support Destiny's sustained membership in the college community. She and all of us in the academy have much to gain from her presence.

First of all, Destiny's family life affords bountiful evidence of the richness of her experience. She is a strong, sensitive, proud, and joyful mother. Whether she is monitoring Shamel's diet for its nutritional value, planning his Christmas festivities, or encouraging his intellectual and social awareness, Destiny's intuitive understanding of her child fosters her conscientious efforts to assure his physical, intellectual, and emotional growth and well-being. While her family was worried and angered by her early pregnancy, they have come to celebrate Destiny's relationship with her son.

Through her single motherhood at age 18, Destiny became a member of a population about whom much has been written. Like the "underprepared" college student group to which she also belongs, "teenage mothers" are often considered in pathological terms. For example, Luker (1996) asserts a great many Americans think that when very young women give birth to children, these children are

lost in a particularly painful and troubling fashion which has important implications for the larger society.... [The children's lives] are being compromised by the selfishness of [their mothers], by [their] inability to put the long-term needs of a vulnerable baby before [their] own longings and desires. According to the most generous interpretation, [these mothers] are doing this out of youth and ignorance. (p. 3-4)

Kaplan (1997) also considers a negative view of "teen mothers" when she states that these young women "had babies because they were isolated from society and unwanted by everyone around them" (p. 181).

While Ms. Jordan believes that Destiny was "lost" in many ways before Shamel's birth, the negative implications of Luker (1996) and Kaplan's (1997) depictions cannot be applied to her or her son. Much as she defies the stereotype of the "developmental" college student, Destiny belies deficit descriptions of young mothers. As she told her mother, she is "not a statistic," nor is Shamel neglected. Rather, Destiny is an industrious young mother, creating, with Shamel's father, a family unit for their son and themselves within their larger families. Shamel is a bright, curious child, articulate and educated through his parents' guidance and the care they have provided for him.

Unlike many of the young mothers Luker (1996) interviewed who "readily describe how hard it is to raise a child" (p. 134), Destiny speaks proudly of her nurturing of Shamel. Unlike the young mothers cited by Ludtke (1997), who claim to have no "no idea" (p. 199) of what they need to do to raise their children, she is confident in her ability to parent and pleased with her son's precocious ways. Moreover, unlike a young mother Ludtke interviewed who expressed her worry over her ability to cope -- "I know if I let what [my children] do bother me, I am going to hurt them" (p. 212) -- Destiny is patient with her son, finding humor in the antics of her little boy even as she firmly, but gently, corrects him when necessary.

While her experience matches Ludtke's (1997) findings that her family's help in caring for Shamel facilitates her concentration on her education, she is not waiting, as Ludtke claims further, "a few years down the way... [to be] better able to handle the responsibilities ...[involved in] establishing herself in the parenting role" (p. 199). Destiny appreciates her family's support and is, like the African American college

students studied by Kiah (1992), particularly grateful for her mother's encouragement of her schooling, but she depends on herself and Terrell to raise Shamel.

This practical aplomb which I witnessed in her behavior in our classroom and in her mothering of Shamel seems to guide Destiny through her responses to the various other circumstances of her life. She is capable in dealing with both her close-knit, but sometimes demanding, extended family and her friends. Our conversations indicate that she was sensitive and appropriate in treating the patients she encountered through her nursing practice, and I witnessed her competence in accommodating the customers she meets through her work in the computer store. As Sternglass (1997) observes, the demands of Destiny's work week, like those of many "underprepared" college students, limit the number of hours she has available for academic pursuits. Yet, Destiny, like others in her situation, nurtures the "ingenuity and doggedness [which] often compensate for the shorter available hours" (Sternglass, p. 62). So while they tap her energy, Destiny's experiences in the workplace encourage her growth as well.

I have also learned during the course of our inquiry of Destiny's ability to muster the insights and vigor necessary to develop friendships across the boundaries of age, gender, race, and social circumstance. Not only does she extend herself to old friends and new acquaintances at the college or on her job, she never fails to ask me, whenever we get together, about my family and my personal concerns. I am amused now by my memory of my uneasiness upon meeting Destiny; it contrasts sharply with the comfort I find in talking with her. When I share news or feelings, I am repeatedly touched by her thoughtful reply. While she is never flip in reacting to my conversation about my issues, her remarks make me smile. I agree with Ms. Jordan's view of her daughter: Destiny

always seems to know the right thing to say to encourage and support the people in her life.

Destiny's insights lead her even beyond sensitive verbal responses to courses of productive action. Whether it is in her home, at her job, or on the social scene, Destiny seems to build upon whatever guidelines society's conventions have set for her performance to determine for herself what she needs to do. She also carries out her efforts fruitfully, whether she is helping an aunt to secure a job or monitoring Shamel's treatment for an ankle sprained at a child's party. Her ability to manage the various aspects of her life demonstrates that she possesses, like my other student-collaborators, the "new competencies," including the "ability to solve problems, to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty, and, especially, to be creative and personally enterprising" that Abbott (1995, p. 8) considers essential to the assumption of a productive role in society.

Over the course of our inquiry, I've learned that many of the people in Destiny's life share my and Ms. Jordan's belief that Destiny is a strong and determined woman. Her loved ones appreciate the grace with which she meets the demands of daily living while she remains focused on her goals. For example, Dee, Destiny's brother, told me that she has always taken care of him: advising him, supporting him, and providing for him in whatever ways she can. Friends, including Terrell, and relatives readily seek Destiny's advice, and she responds with confidence and generosity.

Destiny is comfortable with her competence in addressing whatever issues she and her loved ones face. She knows, for example, that although her doctor and her family may advise her on the various aspects of parenting, she and Terrell are ultimately responsible for Shamel's well-being. She listens to the advice she's offered, but she

makes her own decisions. I've witnessed this independence on several occasions. I've seen Destiny consider and then decide the proper fit of Shamel's shoes, the appropriate time for him to nap, or the most effective way to encourage him to cooperate with his playmates, not to mention the most supportive means of providing his continuously nurturing care.

Destiny's confidence seems to extend into her work as well. She was proud to tell me that when she practiced nursing, she was the youngest person to have her particular job responsibilities at the county hospital and that she felt capable in the execution of her duties. She also knows that she has an obligation to her customers at the computer store and believes she can meet that responsibility while ensuring herself and her coworkers their rights as employees.

The multiple perspectives from which Destiny and I have constructed her portrait unite in the view that she possesses a strong sense of both who she is and who other people are as well. Gardner (1993) observes that when developed, these intra-personal and inter-personal capabilities or "intelligences" facilitate the reading of the psychological and emotional needs of others. They also prompt the ability to act effectively upon these perceptions. Destiny's story illustrates Gardner's view, and as he further notes, Destiny's facility with people indicates her potential to become an insightful, caring Registered Nurse. If we who are members of the academy, and in many ways, gatekeepers to the nursing classroom and clinical site, facilitate her presence among us, we afford ourselves the opportunity to learn from Destiny's "intelligences." At the same time, we afford her the intellectual and professional growth she seeks.

Although Destiny and I have been working on our inquiry for approximately eighteen months, I am still uncertain of how to read Destiny's assessment of herself as a student. When she speaks of her successes, she does so proudly. She knows, for example, that she can apply the knowledge and capabilities acquired through her life's experiences to issues that are raised in the college classroom. On the other hand, when she discusses her concerns, she displays very little affect. Rather, she offers possible solutions to the academic dilemmas in which she has found herself from time to time since she has begun her credit-bearing coursework. Although she occasionally seems apprehensive about an instructor or a task, she makes no excuses for her performance. Much in the way she understands the responsibilities involved in parenting Shamel, she believes that she must be her own agent in meeting her educational and professional goals.

In order to gain insight into Destiny's academic life at the college, I secured her permission to speak with several of her teachers. When I talked with the faculty members who worked with Destiny during the Fall 1997 term, the semester Destiny was a student in my class, I learned that they shared several of my impressions of her. Her math teacher, for example, said, "Oh, she kept me thinking. She asked questions and made sure she got the answers." She corroborated Destiny's view that she and her instructor worked well together. Destiny's English professor and her seminar advisor spoke of her management of her multiple responsibilities and her persistence in their classrooms.

While I have not been personally acquainted with any of Destiny's instructors since that first term, I have spoken with a few of them about her. Although they seemed to enjoy her presence in their classes, they did not appear to be as familiar with her as those she worked during her first semester at the college. Why this is so, I do not know.

It may have to do with the structure of the courses, the number of students in each section, or Destiny's participation in each class.

In any case, she's told me she's motivated to pursue her nursing degree despite the stress it adds to her life because she knows that she is ultimately responsible for herself and Shamel. She considers herself "a strong woman" who can relate to the experiences of others in her classes and offer the particular insights she has gained through "being a parent and an independent young black woman." Abbott's (1997) work celebrates Destiny's confidence and willingness to share and recognizes the importance of the insights she has gained through her experience outside of her formal schooling as critical to the education of society in and beyond the academy. Abbott sees in students like her the "imagination, involvement, and active participation" that has the potential to "revitalize the entire community" (p. 10). Sternglass (1997) agrees and notes that students who bring their experiences into the classroom afford "the entire society [of and beyond college] the opportunity to change in directions that will benefit all" (p. 113).

While Destiny is proud of her accomplishments, she admits that she struggles in school. However, she believes that her goals are worth her continued effort. "I'm too independent to quit school," she said. "I can't survive without it. The things I want out of life, like a challenging profession and a comfortable life for Shamel and me, I need college to get. I don't think everyone struggles all their lives; people who do put themselves in that predicament." As a mother who will head her own household, with or without Terrell, Destiny risks socioeconomic vulnerability (Wilson, 1987). Not only does higher education afford the intellectual stimulation and professional knowledge she seeks, it facilitates her own and Shamel's social and economic well-being.

As Destiny addresses the rigors of her life within and beyond the college community, she affords herself and us the opportunity to learn from the experiences and the capabilities she employs to make her way. As members of the academy, it is our obligation to encourage and support Destiny's stay among us. She and we have much to gain from her presence.

CHAPTER 6

Concluding Thoughts

The portraits of the four Basic Education Program students who participated in this study illustrate the individual details of their lives. The stories I have written from the hundreds of pages of transcriptions, notes, documents, and other material each of my students has offered me reflect our shared interpretations of their experiences, thoughts, feelings, insights, and concerns from their early memories through their young adulthood. While I'd like to think we were brought together by happenstance, I realize that I was drawn to each of these students in some manner, and this attraction encouraged me to ask each one to collaborate with me. Despite this, twelve years of experience in the "developmental" college classroom provide me the confidence to claim that any four students I might have worked with would afford those who read this report pictures of compelling individuals whose circumstances are as unique as those presented here.

Issues at the Roots of Issues

Yet, when I consider the portraits my four individual student-collaborators and I have presented of their lives in and out of school from their childhoods through their first two years of higher education, I can find clear evidence of threads that weave among them. Each of these students comes to college with readily apparent academic concerns. While the circumstances surrounding these issues vary, they reflect those that are commonly held responsible for "underpreparedness" among college students: deficiencies in academic settings, environmental distractions, and home cultures unfamiliar with the culture of the academy, among others (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Cross, 1979; Needham, 1994; Roberts, 1990; Rose, 1989; Shaughnessy, 1977; Wilson, S., 1994).

These circumstances, which largely account for my students' presence in my classroom, bear examination. As Henry (1999) so succinctly states, "Developmental," "remedial," "underprepared," or "basic" students "are made not born." They are created by a society that stratifies its members, privileging those whose "discourse" is compatible with the concentration of power and penalizing those whose "identity kit" (Gee, 1996, p. 127) varies from it.

Gee (1996) defines and describes discourse:

as ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize. (p. 127)

Inherent in this construct are the implications that discourses promote certain views and values while marginalizing those intrinsic to other discourses, and that discourses are closely tied to the power structure and distribution of wealth in a society.

McLaren (1994) also discusses these ideas as they relate to formal systems of education. He describes the concept of "cultural capital," as representing "ways of talking, acting, and socializing, as well as language practices, values, and styles of dress and behavior" (p. 198). McLaren observes that students tend to be most valued in school if their "cultural capital" is similar to that of the academy's powerbrokers. So when my students come to college "new" (Cross, 1979) to its environment and its "discourse," they are often doing so already marginalized in relation to the dominant academic discourse

because of its difference from their "primary" "identity kit" (Gee, 1997) or "cultural capital" (McLaren, 1994).

The culture of Tree's home community varies from that of our college. It is up to Tree to adapt to our ways or risk his welcome. When McKenna enrolls in our courses, she does so wary of her right to do so. She mentioned, only recently, the incredulity with which the teachers at her former high school reacted when they learned of her persistence in college. Julius' rich heritage has singled him out since his earliest days of school when the language of the academy confronted that of his home. If his college teachers recognize his gift of multilingualism, he is grateful, rather than expectant, of their appreciation. Destiny understands that her role as Shamel's mother is a responsibility as well as a privilege. She knows that there are those who will label her for it regardless of her efforts to prove them wrong. While my students' experiences and cultural backgrounds are intrinsic to who they are and what they have to offer, they often find themselves reckoning with their diversity rather than celebrating it.

This sorting, classifying, and ranking of students begins in their earliest days of elementary school. Instructional policies and programs frequently fail to account for the sociocultural diversity of students (Diamond & Moore, 1995; Johnston & Allington, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) in their intentional or unintentional perpetuation of the hegemony of the "white, middle-class, male culture" which dominates U.S. society in and out of its schools (Knott, 1991). The American system of formal education disenfranchises those whose "discourse" or "cultural capital" differs from that of the academy and its gatekeepers (Giroux, 1992). Students in such settings are denied

the opportunity to create their own literate environments. They [are] denied ownership of their own literate lives, their personal and shared histories, and they [do] not have the opportunity to learn to use print in ways that [will] eventually give them access to the literacies of the world outside of their own community. (Taylor, 1998, p. 32)

This includes the world of higher education.

Thus, limits on my students' access to college can be seen to originate, not only in their experiences in primary school, but in who they are or what groups they belong to before they ever get there. When school administrators and teachers, as well as those who head the political power structures which control their funds, value the strengths or capabilities of certain individuals or groups over others, they are predetermining the success or failure of all students, including mine. By the time marginalized students reach high school, the mounting deficiencies in their academic education doom them to a place within a non-academic "track" or path of study. The track through which students complete high school is a strong determinant of their opportunity to pursue higher education (Lavin, Alba, & Silberstein, 1979; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996) and the social and financial well-being it implies. In this, the U.S. system of education is, wittingly or unwittingly, complicit in a social and political effort to "prepare only some people to flourish in a democracy... to consent to the existence, within the boundaries of what we call public education, of the most exclusive country club of all" (Shaughnessy, 1977, as cited in Maher, 1997, p. 205).

When I consider these claims in the context of my four collaborators' high school experiences, I see much corroborating evidence. My students' stories reveal their

distinctly marginal places in their schools' societies. Tree, McKenna, and Destiny did not graduate from the high schools in which they originally enrolled, and they do not seem to have built ties to their various schools. They adamantly refused my suggestion that I visit any of the six high schools they had collectively attended. Their conversations about high school were directed, for the most part, toward social matters or problematic classroom performance, and they offered few anecdotes or observations to counter their negative views of their high school experiences. Only Julius seems to have enjoyed his high school. He asked me, at the outset of our investigation, to go to his school. However, he specifically sent me there to meet Ms. Manetta, his teacher-mentor. He spoke equally enthusiastically about his soccer coach. While he worked with both his teacher-mentor and his coach across his four years at the school, neither was present in his daily academic classes.

Beating the Odds

As Tree has stated on several occasions, my students "beat the odds" in overcoming or circumventing the social, political, and academic factors obstructing their access to college. As their stories illustrate, they have managed this through the power of their own agency. In doing so, my collaborators offer those of us they encounter in college the strengths and capabilities they have nurtured as they have led their lives and pursued their higher education. While their portraits are individual, there are overlaps in circumstance, "common currents" that run among them (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1995, p. 603). These common bonds seem to contribute, not only to my collaborators' persistence in our investigation, but also to their pursuit of higher education despite the vulnerabilities that would otherwise prevent them from doing so.

Family Support and Response

All of my student-collaborators benefit from the support of family members in their attempts to attain degrees. While they are all first-generation college students navigating their specific journeys through the academy themselves, they have all spoken repeatedly about their families' encouragement of their efforts, and I have heard each of their mothers voice her pride in her child's pursuit of education. According to Hudson (1991), persistence to graduation among first-generation college students is more closely related to the support received from family than it is to academic preparation. Levine and Nidiffer (1996) have found that this influence is particularly important in the case of young adults from lower socio-economic groups, who most often pursue college through the intervention of "a loving relative" (p. 65). Students who do not receive this encouragement tend to find themselves at odds with their aspirations for a college degree (London, 1992).

Moreover, all of my students are loyal and capable family members. They accept responsibility for their roles in their families and rise to challenges on a variety of fronts, often in difficult circumstances. It is largely through their commitments to parents, children, siblings, and relatives that my students have fostered competencies and skills necessary for their adult lives in the global society of the future (Abbott, 1993, 1995; Gardner, 1993; Gordon, Bowman, & McCallister, in progress; Sternberg, 1997).

The Gifts My Students Bring to College

These students have further advanced these capabilities through their lives outside their homes (Abbott, 1995). As they have wended their way through their elementary and high school paths, they have all held jobs, negotiated neighborhoods or social scenes, and

participated in religious, athletic, community, and social groups and relationships on a formal and informal basis. In these settings, they have displayed their ability to lead and to follow, to make daring choices and thoughtful decisions, and to act upon their beliefs to enrich those people and circumstances involved in their work, play, and worship. They, like many students disenfranchised by educational institutions, have frequently managed this in spite of their schooling rather than through it (Gardner, 1993; Sternglass, 1997).

In failing to recognize my students' creativity and the "often undefinable savvy about the world and how it works" (Payne & Lyman, 1996, p. 14) or "street smarts" (Sternberg, 1997, p. 20) through which they make their way to college, educational institutions have undermined, rather than encouraged, my students. Yet my students' pursuit of college indicates that, ultimately, they have rejected the messages transmitted by their former schools. In taking the risk of attending college in spite of their earlier academic experiences, my students have proven themselves to possess the abilities "to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty, to be creative and personally enterprising," abilities essential for life in contemporary society and abilities which should be celebrated in school (Abbott, 1995, p. 8).

Along with their competencies, my students enroll in college with the motivation they find in their shared desire be fruitful, productive, and personally and professionally contributing members of society. While my collaborators pursue specific career goals as unique as each of their personalities and experiences, they coincide in their recognition of the critical importance of higher education in helping them to achieve these goals.

Despite the responsibilities, distractions, and issues which impact upon their progress, they persist in their pursuit of college degrees.

The Academy's Response and Responsibility

My students and I have presented individual arguments in support of their contributions to the academic community. Collectively, my students' stories paint a group portrait consistent with their individual pictures. They and students like them everywhere need to be encouraged to join forces with those of who consider ourselves members of the academy, not only for their sake, but for ours as well. Those of us responsible for higher education in this country must open the academy's gates to afford the entry of the knowledge, strengths, and capabilities my students, and all students, bring with them to their colleges and universities by virtue of their richly experienced lives.

Encouragement of Access

Moreover, those who control policy and, thus, access to higher learning must reconsider restrictions placed on the opportunity to achieve full "membership" in the "academic club" (Rose, 1989) that is college. Policy makers must rethink their decision to eliminate "remedial" coursework and, thereby, the students who enroll in it, from the campuses of colleges and universities. Legislators in Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, and Massachusetts, who investigate restricting such programming (Phipps, 1999), must not endanger their states' higher education systems. They must not repeat the error committed in June 1998 by the trustees of the City University of New York (CUNY) when they eliminated "developmental" studies and students from CUNY's four year colleges and universities (Breneman & Haarlow, 1999; Phipps, 1998). These students, along with the students, faculty, and administrators who

remain, have had their educational opportunities jeopardized. "Developmental" college students like those lost to the four year CUNY system

are precisely the students that society [in and beyond the academy] needs to nurture.... Not only will these individuals have more satisfying lives, but the larger society will benefit from receiving valuable input from a segment of the society that is often denied the opportunity to make a contribution. (Sternglass, 1997, p. 300)

Pedagogy to Support Retention

As Sternglass (1997) implies, motivation and persistence on the part of my students and all "developmental" college students cannot alone ensure their successful accomplishment of their goals for higher education. While the power of their agency is undeniable, it cannot be expected to level the gullies in the educational playing fields through which these students have made their way to college. We in the academy must facilitate their efforts through our endeavors. We must encourage all students, "developmental" or otherwise, to make personal connections to the college community. Their enfranchisement is essential in furthering their willingness to share their strengths and capabilities, as well as to remain constant in their pursuit of higher education, despite factors which counter their efforts.

In order for us to accomplish this, we must rethink the descriptions historically assigned to our students by those educators who have struggled to facilitate their learning since the earliest days of open admissions. Incompatible with the findings of my study is Cross' (1971) observation that

the "new" students to the academy prefer to learn what others have said rather than to engage in intellectual questioning. They do not enjoy intellectual puzzles or the complicated manipulation of ideas and abstractions. New students possess a more pragmatic, less questioning, more authoritarian system of values than traditional students. (p. 159)

Cross' recent work seems to reflect an evolution of thought among educators of college reading and writing students. In her commitment to the "constructivist" theory of learning, she applauds "student-centered" school environments "in which the intention is to move the activity of learning away from the provision of authoritative 'answers' by the teacher toward the student construction of knowledge" (1998, p. 14). She supports the work of Ausubel (1977) whose strategy she paraphrases: "find out what a student knows and teach accordingly" (p. 15).

Our teaching needs to develop further. Rather than determining what "a student knows" and "teaching" to that, we, who guide the academy's policies and practice, must explore what all our individual students know and encourage them to use their knowledge, insights, strengths, and abilities to teach themselves and all of us in and out of the academy. If we can manage this, through our coursework and our conversation, we will facilitate the growth of our students, our schools, and ourselves. In doing so, we will detach ourselves from the connotations of sickness and deficiency so often associated with "remedial" studies or programs (Johnston & Allington, 1991), regardless of the specific terms through which we identify them, and focus on the health and well-being of us all.

While efforts to promote pedagogy which values all learners should be evident in the policy and practice upon which all our schools are built, those of us within institutions of higher learning, with our associated opportunities for research and study, must participate wholeheartedly in such initiatives. We must lead our colleagues across the various levels of the academy through broad programming decisions and individual classroom practices. We must facilitate our own and our students' exploration of their knowledge and capabilities through the reading, writing, speaking, and listening upon which we build our classes and our campus community. We must follow the advice of Goodman and Marek (1996) and focus our teaching on our students' strengths rather than weaknesses by "revaluing" our students and encouraging them to "revalue" themselves. In so doing, we will provide educational opportunities for all of us beyond those afforded by any "remedial" program (p. 11).

If we consider my students' views of themselves as academic learners, we can find strong evidence with which to argue this perspective. Tree, McKenna, Julius, and Destiny worry regularly about their abilities or efforts to meet the rigors of their college coursework, not only in relation to the other demands on their energies, but in terms of their academic histories. As Dickson (1995) observes, this anxiety is an indication of my students' desire to learn, and we, as the more experienced, comfortable members of the academy, need to assist our students to recognize both this and their potential as learners. "[Our students] need to define themselves as literate human beings, not as cheaters in the system" (Goodman & Marek, p. 11). Our students must be encouraged to recognize themselves as leaders of our learning environments. If they do not, "they are less invested in the academic task[s and community] and their sense of ownership in the

learning process is minimized" (Spires, Huffman, Honeycutt, & Barrow, 1995, p. 340), as is our own. We can only facilitate our students' confidence and enfranchisement when we demonstrate that we believe in them ourselves by marshaling our efforts to counter the prevailing deficit views.

Programming to Encourage Retention

While students like mine often enter college tentative about their identity as students in the classroom and members of the campus community (Henry, 1995; Rose, 1989; Scott, 1993; Shaughnessy, 1977; Sternglass, 1997), my study offers evidence that they are willing to enfranchise themselves to the academy. Moreover, I can find from my experiences with my students reason to believe that our efforts to facilitate their presence among us should extend beyond the connection between student and teacher as participants in the same class for a 16 week semester.

When I was establishing the parameters of my investigation, I was uncertain of just how many students I should ask to help me. I realized that I was seeking an enormous commitment on their part, and I was unsure of how to present my proposed inquiry to be certain that my students would realize the potential inconvenience, discomfort, or intrusion inherent in its methods. After much consideration, I determined that if I initiated my work with four collaborators, I would hopefully retain more than one throughout its course.

My students, like those of the "developmental" college population at large, tend to leave college without completing degrees (Phipps, 1998). Based on the patterns established over the twelve years our program has been in existence, our department estimates that approximately 40% will stop attending by the end of their second semester.

The circumstances in the sections of Reading 090 in which my student-collaborators were members illustrate this attrition: Of the fourteen students on my roster in the Fall 1997, 8 a.m. section in which McKenna and Destiny participated, only they and two other students are still attending our school as I write this in the Spring 1999 semester. One of these two students is a member of the college's football team and is preparing to transfer in the fall to a four year college. The other is a young man who left school for financial reasons after the Fall 1997 semester and re-enrolled last term. Of the fifteen students on the roster in the 2 p.m. class in which Marcus and Julius were students, they, two of the seven football players, and one young woman, currently enrolled in an Office Technology certificate program, remain.

When I consider that the athletes still present on campus have formed individual bonds with the college community through their participation in its athletic program, I feel confident in concurring with the research which finds that a personal connection to people and programs in and beyond the "developmental" classroom is critically important to the retention of its students and the prosperity of the academy (Boylan, 1983; Brown, 1995; Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Dougherty, 1994; Griffin, 1992; Padron, 1992; Salter & Noblett, 1994; Soliday, 1996). Moreover, my student-collaborators' persistence, throughout our inquiry and across their challenging programs of study, indicates that they have connected with our college community. As their stories reveal, they continue to confront academic vulnerabilities and personal responsibilities as they pursue school. Yet they are defying the research which points to these issues as reason to abandon their studies (Niesler, 1992; Riehl, 1994; Rogers, 1990). Despite their academic and personal

concerns, they are extending themselves to their coursework and their colleagues at the college.

We must reciprocate. Those of us who guide the "developmental" college classroom must acknowledge the competencies and capabilities of our students. Those of us specifically in the college reading and writing classroom must facilitate our joint efforts to utilize these abilities to foster our mutual intellectual and academic growth. Since the strengths all of us bring to college are evidenced in and developed through the contexts of our lives, we must celebrate our diversity in our classrooms. We must share our varied experiences, valuing their differences "to see [ourselves] as rooted in other cultures yet also belonging to, becoming transformed by, and in turn transforming [our] school['s] cultures" (Soliday, 1994, p. 522). When we accomplish this, "instead of being seen as outsiders who must choose to write [or read, speak or think] either from within or against the academy, [our] students assume a position of strength" (Soliday, p. 522) just as the academy is strengthened by their presence.

Some Final Thoughts about My Students' Portraits

My students have evidenced their willingness to collaborate in their commitment to their conversations with me, as well as their ready, if sometimes diffident, participation in the activities of the college in and out of its classrooms. My experiences with my students mirrors that of Lawrence-Lightfoot (1995) who sees her work in creating portraiture as a collaboration or "cocreation" between those whose stories appear on the printed page and herself. As she has also found in her experiences as a portraitist, the relationship that has evolved between my individual students and myself has varied

across personalities and circumstances even as we have remained focused on telling our stories.

Although I recognize the tenuousness of my attempts to view the world through my students' eyes, (Suskind, 1998), my relationship with them has encouraged me to develop my sensitivity toward our interpretations of their experiences. I have followed my collaborators' leads in what I have included, emphasized, or left unstated. When Tree called me to ask me to speak with Kevin, I learned that a discussion of their friendship must be reflected in Tree's portrait since Kevin's friendship has shaped Tree's life. When McKenna told me that her cousin wanted to be known as "Roy" in these pages, I realized that Roy must play a prominent role in her story just as he does in her thoughts and experiences. When Julius invited me to visit his soccer practices and games, I understood that I must convey the enthusiasm of his participation. When Destiny explained that she brought Shamel with her to several of our meetings, despite her family's willingness to watch him for her, I knew that I must portray her pride in her son and herself.

As I have tried to listen for my students' stories, I have tried not to tread too boldly into areas of potential discomfort for them and attempted to consider with them the implications of their participation. Although they were more than willing to be identified by name in this report, I convinced them that their right to privacy mandated otherwise. The pseudonyms they created reflect representations they deliberately set about to convey. Tree or "Marcus Prince" was pleased when I called him a "prince among men;" "McKenna Green" liked the poetic ring to the nomer that maintained her monogram. "Julius E. Villa" named himself after his new sister and his family's culture,

and "Destiny Jordan" believes in the message implied in the name that pays homage to basketball's hero.

In keeping with my own and the ethics demanded by portraiture, I have attempted to respect my students' sensitivities (Sternglass, 1997) throughout my investigation and accounts of their stories. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1995) says, "when the storytellers resist, when their faces close down or they look away, these are the places I dare not tread, the points beyond which - by silent mutual agreement - I must not go" (p. 610). There have been very few of these, but if my portraits do not dwell on the absence or presence of people or circumstances, this is my response to my student-collaborators' dual roles in telling and listening to the stories of their lives.

The portraits we have painted in these pages are the results of an inquiry planned and conducted across these last two years, yet one which springs from the expanse of our lives as students and teachers. As I reflect upon the time my collaborators and I have spent together, I am moved by the steadfastness, insightfulness, and generosity with which they have guided the course of our study. Neither my students nor I know how our stories will end. We are confident, however, that those of us within the academy must hear the voices of those who seek welcome. We all have too much to gain and too much to lose to do anything else.

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Appendix A

Island Community College Informants' Agreements

ISLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE (ICC)
Institutional Review Board Involving Human Subjects (IRB)

Research Application # _____

Date: November 18, 1997

- 1) Applicant: Christine G. Berg
150 Harvard Avenue
Rockville Centre, NY 11570
516-536-8921
- 2) Applicant School Affiliation:
Hofstra University
102 Mason Hall
Hempstead, NY 11550-1090
Research Chair:
Dr. Jeanne Henry
516-463-5801
- 3) Title of Proposed Research:
An Inquiry into Developmental College Students in the Northeastern U.S.
- 4) Purpose of Proposed Research:
Doctoral Dissertation

5) Synopsis of Research:

As you know from my visit last spring regarding my pilot study for this dissertation inquiry, I plan to work with four of my former students at Island Community College on an investigation directed by my student collaborators and focused on their experiences before and during their college years and their reflections upon them. There are several questions that I would like to explore:

1. What are the past and present home, school, work and/or social experiences of developmental reading and writing students in a community college in the northeast?
2. What role, if any, did/do activities encompassing reading and writing play in these experiences? (What kinds, if any, of reading and writing did/do my students engage in at home, school, work and/or in social situations? What did/do my students think and feel about these reading/writing activities?)
3. What role, if any, does reading and writing instruction play in my students' experiences in and out of school through the duration of this investigation? (I plan a one to two semester investigation to be conducted during the Spring 1998 term with a follow-up during the Fall 1998 semester.)
4. How do my students view their reading/writing coursework in terms of their experiences in and out of school?
5. What role, if any, did reading and writing instruction play in my students' experiences as readers and writers in and out of school during their years prior to enrolling in college?
6. What do my students think and feel about the reading/writing instruction they experienced during their years prior to coming to college?
7. What is the relationship, if any, between my students' experiences and reflections upon them to published research on underprepared college students?
8. What is the relationship, if any, between my findings and the current debate on access versus admission and performance in higher education?
9. How can what I learn from my student collaborators inform my practice as a developmental reading/writing teacher?
10. How can what I learn from my student collaborators inform the practice of other developmental reading/writing teachers?

I hope to work with my student collaborators to record and reflect upon their life histories. As such my study will be qualitative in nature, employing interviews, participant observations, collection of material culture and any other means my collaborators and I can come up with to facilitate my learning and telling about their growth and development as individual learners, readers and writers.

It is my belief that my study has the potential to inform the field by enabling those of us who work with the population described as "underprepared" for college to gain insights into the experiences of my collaborators prior to and during their college years as well as their reflections upon these experiences. Much of the literature on developmental college students is deficit-based. I hope to encourage educators to consider the wealth of knowledge and experience individuals bring to the college classroom rather than to focus upon what they may not. That this consideration is critical to fruitful teaching and learning will hopefully be made evident to practitioners in this field by grounding it in a review of relevant literature in literacy theory and research.

The collaborators who work with me in this inquiry will direct their histories. As such I will learn about them what they want me to know. Our findings will be strictly confidential in that I will review with each of them the data we glean as we go about collecting it and throughout my "write up" of this information. They will have the right to refuse any and all aspects of their histories from appearing in my written dissertation. In addition, I will assure my students that they have the right to abandon our inquiry at any point in its process. (For this reason, I am hoping to begin my investigation with four students, anticipating that some of them may not be able to follow our study to its end.) My students' names will, of course, be changed in my written discussion to ensure their privacy from potential readers of my dissertation. In order to secure informed consent from my collaborators, I will meet with them individually to explain my proposed investigation, and I will elaborate on each of my study's questions as well as my suggested means of collecting data. In order to ensure reciprocity for my student collaborators, I will offer my services as a tutor/mentor to them throughout our investigation and for the remainder of their years at the college. It is my sincere belief that my students have taught me more over the eleven years that I have been working in the Basic Education Program than any educator I have encountered as an undergraduate or graduate student. It is this knowledge that I will build on throughout this inquiry and the insights into pedagogy that I have gleaned from my students that I hope to share with the readers of my dissertation.

6) According to ICC "Guidelines For Research Involving Human Subjects", section annotated "B", "Categories of Review", this applicant is applying for IRB Service Category:

_____ Exempt _____ Expedited _____ Full View

(The final decision of the Review Category of a particular project, and the approval for commencing work on the project at ICC resides with the IRB).

November 18, 1997

7) IRB Decision & Date:

8) Names & Vote of IRB members on this application:

CONSENT FORM

Title of project: An Inquiry into Developmental College Students in the Northeastern U.S.

Christine G. Berg, Investigator

The purpose of this research project is my doctoral dissertation and my desire to share with the field of developmental education the wealth of information and experience that my students bring to the college classroom.

If you decide to participate, your part in the research project will involve an intense study of your experiences as outlined by the questions on the previous pages of this document as well as your reflections upon these experiences. It is my plan to conduct this investigation from this point in time through the Spring 1998 semester and into the summer as needed. I would like to follow up our inquiry during the Fall 1998 term.

In order to learn all about your life history as a learner, reader and writer, I would like to interview you on several occasions about your experiences, meet and talk with those people you feel would be helpful to our study including but not limited to family members, former teachers, friends, acquaintances and employers. I would like to accompany you to class from time to time during the spring and possibly fall 1998 semesters, providing the instructor of the class you invite me to is in agreement with my attendance. I would like to visit you at sites you and I agree upon at various times of your choosing in order to learn more about you. I would like to collect samples of your writing that you would like me to share. I would like to investigate your life in any way you feel would help us to share with our readers the wealth of experience and knowledge you bring to the college classroom. Please be aware that my proposed inquiry will take many hours of your time and much of your patience as well as many of your insights.

Your participation in our inquiry may result in your opportunity to have your story told. I would also like to offer you my time in return for yours, so to that end I will be available as a tutor/mentor to you during your years at Island.

You may find that the inconvenience that you experience participating in this inquiry will detract from our efforts. If so, you are free to withdraw from this project at any point. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. Please know that I understand this and realize that you do not have to participate if you do not want to. Your decision about whether to participate or not will have no effect on any activities, grades, or benefits which you are entitled to from me or this college. You can change your mind and withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. There are no risks involved in withdrawing from this project.

Any information that we obtain from this study about you, including your identity, will be held confidential. We will use pseudonyms when we record what we learn and when we analyze it in my dissertation.

If, at any time, you have questions about this project, please contact me at home at 516-536-8921 or Dr. Jeanne Henry, Hofstra University, Phone # 516-463-5801.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research collaborator, please contact the IRB, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects; Phone #

If you agree to participate in this research project, please sign and print your name below. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, or have had it read to you, and that you have voluntarily decided to participate.

Signature of Collaborator

Date

Name of Collaborator

Signature of Investigator

Date

CONSENT FORM

Title of project: An Inquiry into Developmental College Students in the Northeastern U.S.

Christine G. Berg, Investigator

The purpose of this research project is my doctoral dissertation and my desire to share with the field of developmental education the wealth of information and experience that my students bring to the college classroom.

_____ has asked that I speak with you regarding your knowledge of and experiences with him/her. Your participation in this inquiry may result in the opportunity of my student collaborator having his/her story told. Please be aware that my student will collaborate with me in our story-telling process. When we actually write up our discussion of this project, your identity will be held confidential; we will create pseudonyms to protect your anonymity.

If, at any time, you have questions about this project, please contact me at Island Community College at # or home at 516-536-8921 or my dissertation study chair, Dr. Jeanne Henry, Hofstra University, 516-463-5801.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please sign and print your name below. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and that you have voluntarily decided to participate.

Signature of Informant

Date

Name of Informant

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix B

Proposed Plan of Study Adapted from Mason (1996)

Research questions	Data sources and method	Justification	Practicalities (eg resources, access, skills)	Ethical issues
<p>* What capabilities do I see evident in my student-collaborators as I learn about the past and present home, school, work and social experiences of these "developmental" college readers and writers in a community college in the northeastern U.S.?</p>	<p>* Student-Collaborators Interviews Participant Observations in home, school, work and social settings Collection of Artifacts * Family Members Interviews * Friends Interviews * Work Associates Interviews * Teachers Interviews * Colleagues in School Interviews</p>	<p>*Interviews will provide various accounts of the life experiences and negotiation of these experiences of my student-collaborators. *Participant Observations will allow me to witness my students' negotiation of their home, school, work and social experiences. *The collection of artifacts will provide further evidence of my students' experiences and reflections on these experiences.</p>	<p>*Who and what informs this study will differ according to my access to the various contexts of each of my students' life experiences. *My skills as an interviewer and the comfort of each informant with the interview process will influence the data I obtain.</p>	<p>*Who informs this study is, by design, to be determined by each of my student-collaborators and me. While I may wish to employ these various data collection methods in a variety of contexts, I must consider my students' wishes and follow the leads they offer me.</p>
<p>*How do others who share the various contexts of my students' lives see them as capable within their shared contexts?</p>	<p>*Family Members Interviews *Friends Interviews *Work Associates Interviews *Teachers Interviews *Colleagues at School Interviews</p>	<p>*Interviews with these various informants may provide data because they will have insights through their relationships with my student-collaborators that may broaden my view of my students' negotiation of their lives.</p>	<p>*Who informs my learning about each of my student-collaborators will differ from student to student. *The information I obtain from individual informants will vary since it is dependent not only on my skills as an interviewer but also on the comfort level of each informant with this study.</p>	<p>*According to the agreement I made with my student-collaborators at the outset of this investigation, my students must direct me themselves to other informants regardless of how anxious I may be to talk with one or another potential informant about an individual student.</p>

Research questions	Data sources and method	Justification	Practicalities (eg resources, access, skills)	Ethical issues
*How do my students see themselves as capable within the various contexts of their lives?	*Student-Collaborators Interviews Participant Observations in home, school, work and social settings Collection of Artifacts	*By engaging students in conversations that reveal their views on this question, by observing them in the various contexts of their lives and by collecting artifacts, particularly in terms of documents they create, I may learn in what ways they see themselves as capable.	*I need to develop my interviewing skills to get at this specific question, one which my students may be unlikely to address on their own.	*I must consider my students' comfort with this and all questions I address in this inquiry since I agreed at my investigation's outset to limit my investigation to areas my students and I wish to explore.
*How do my students see themselves and their capabilities in relation to the abilities or competencies traditionally valued by the academy?	*Student-Collaborators Interviews Participant Observations, particularly in school settings Collection of Artifacts	*By engaging students in conversations that reveal their views on this question, by observing them and then talking with them about their negotiation of the academy and by collecting artifacts, particularly in terms of documents created as reflections of their school experiences, I may learn about their views of themselves as students and about what capabilities they see themselves evidencing in the context of school.	*I need to direct conversation to address this question. *I need to gain access to various classroom and school settings involving my student-collaborators.	*According to the agreement I made with my student-collaborators at the outset of this investigation, I must make sure they are comfortable with our conversations on this specific question and my presence in their school settings.

Research questions	Data sources and method	Justification	Practicalities (eg resources, access, skills)	Ethical issues
<p>*How do my students use their capabilities to negotiate the academy, particularly in terms of harnessing its resources and overcoming its barriers?</p> <p>*How do my students see themselves as using their capabilities in this negotiation and as members of the academy?</p>	<p>*Student-Collaborators Interviews Participant Observations, particularly in settings involving school affairs. Collection of Artifacts</p> <p>*Teachers, School Personnel and Colleagues Interviews Participant Observations, particularly in settings involving school affairs. Collection of Artifacts</p>	<p>*By engaging students in conversation about their school-related issues, by participating in their various school experiences and by collecting artifacts created by them in contexts involving school, I should be able to observe their negotiation of the academy.</p> <p>*By conversing with teachers, other school personnel and colleagues of my students within the settings involved in school, by participating in various school experiences involving my students and these informants, I should be able to observe other views of their negotiation of the academy.</p>	<p>*I need to direct conversation with my students and other school-related informants to this topic.</p> <p>*I need to gain access to various school-related settings in order to observe my students interactions with various aspects of academic life.</p>	<p>*As per our agreement, I need to ascertain my students' comfort with our conversations on this topic and my presence in these various academic settings.</p> <p>*I need to be certain that the informants who contribute to examining these questions are comfortable participating in my inquiry.</p>

Appendix C

Student-Collaborators' Courses of Study in College

Fall 1997-Spring 1999

Marcus Prince: Fall 1997 - Reading 090; English 091; Math 002; Seminar 093;

Health 251

Spring 1998 - Reading 002; English 001; Math 109; African-American

Studies 190; Phys. Ed. 301-303

Summer 1998 - African-American Studies 141

Fall 1998 - English 001; Business 110; History 106; Music 102;

African-American Studies 197

Spring 1999 - English 001; Math 101; Communications 130;

Psychology 203

McKenna Green: Fall 1997 - Reading 090; English 091; Math 002; Seminar 093

Spring 1998 - Reading 002; English 001; Math 100; Sociology 201

Summer 1998 - Math 100

Fall 1998 - English 101; Art 125; Communications 101; Health 251

Spring 1999 - English 101; Communications 110; Math 101;

Phys. Ed. 435; Psychology 203

Julius E. Villa: Fall 1997 - Reading 090; English 091; Math 002; Seminar 093; Office

Technology 100

Spring 1998 - Reading 002; English 001; Math 102; Business 110

Fall 1998 - English 101; Business Law 103; Math 102; Health 201;

Phys. Ed. 301

Spring 1999 - English 102; Math 100; Accounting 107; Economics 207;

Communications 101

Destiny Jordan: Fall 1997 - Reading 090; English 091; Math 092; Seminar 092; Office

Technology 100

Spring 1998 - Reading 101; English 101; Math 002; Psychology 203

Fall 1998 - Math 101; Anatomy and Physiology 131; Health 251;

Psychology 213

Spring 1999 - Reading 101; Math 101; Anatomy and Physiology 131;

Contemporary Issues 111

Footnotes

¹ The Iowa Silent Reading Test "measures the skills necessary for successful silent reading in high school and community college" (Farr, 1973, p. 4).

² The Stanford Test of Academic Skills assesses knowledge of basic English grammar and spelling, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry as well as reasoning skills (Gardner, Callis, Merwin, & Rudman, 1981).

³ The Degrees of Reading Power assesses "the ability to comprehend the surface meaning of increasingly more difficult textual material [and] the ability to reason with - that is, analyze, evaluate, and extend the ideas that are presented in - increasingly more difficult textual material" (Touchstone Applied Science Associates, Inc., 1995, p. 1).



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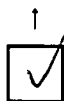
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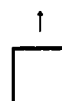


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Organization/Address: <i>Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY</i>	Telephone: <i>516-536-8921</i> FAX: <i>(516) 536-4081</i>
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